Commentary
May 2000

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The Trouble with Karajan
Terry Teachout

Books in Review

Gary Rosen • Wendy Shalit • Marc Berley
Elizabeth Powers • Gabriel Schoenfeld

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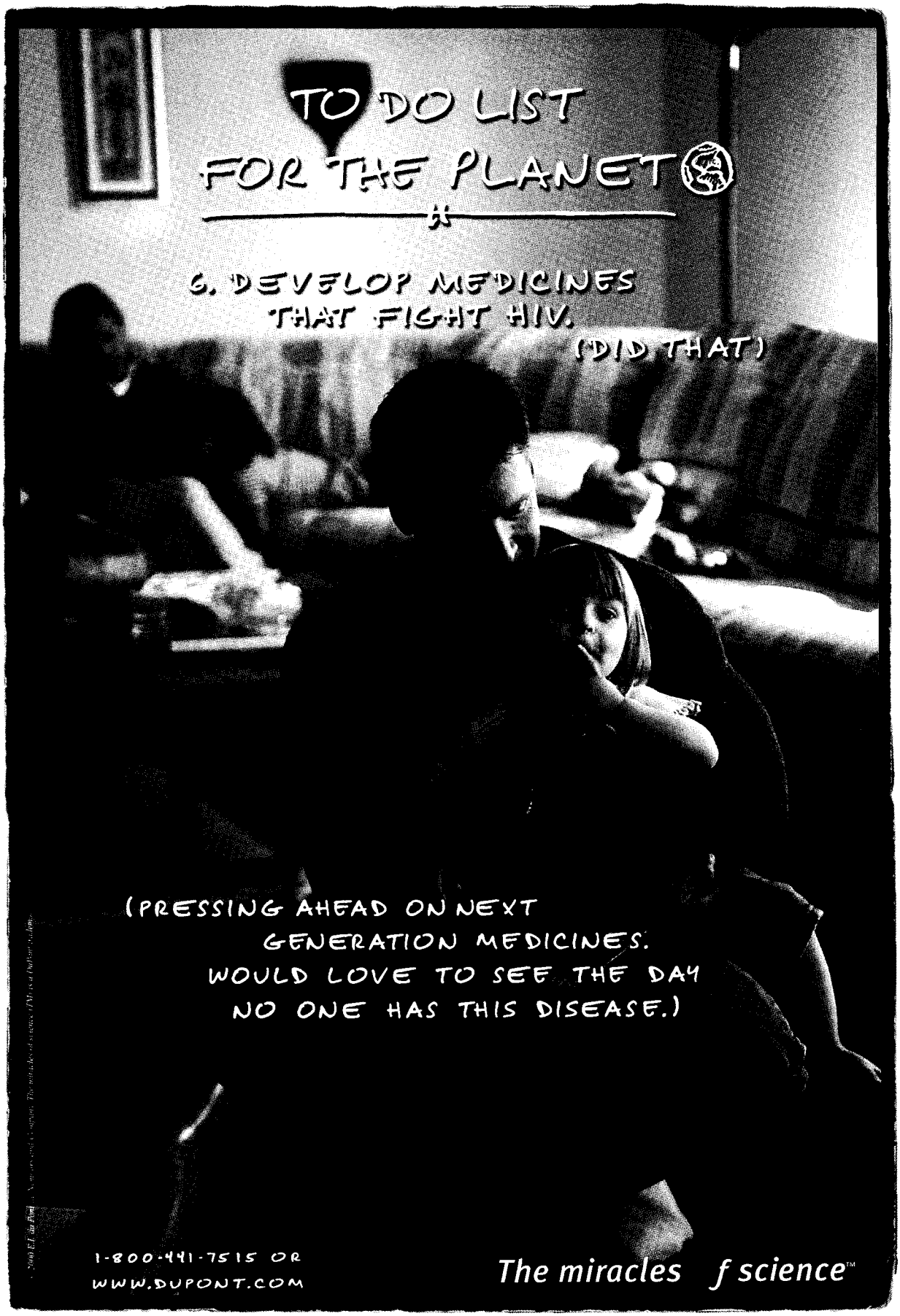

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Commentary

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COMMENTARY (ISSN 0010-2601) is published monthly (except for a combined July-August issue) by the American Jewish Committee—EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022 Telephone: (212) 751-4000. Fax: (212) 751-1174. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Letters intended for publication may be edited. Single copy is $4.50; $45 a year, 2 years $79, 3 years $109—Add $11.00 per year for all foreign subscriptions, including Canada and Latin America. For subscription information call: (800) 829-6270—Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to COMMENTARY, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022. Copyright © 2000 by the American Jewish Committee; all rights reserved under International and Pan American Copyright Conventions—Indexed in *Reader's Guide*, *Book Review Digest*, and elsewhere—Available in reference systems produced by Bell & Howell (800) 521-0600 and Information Access Company (800) 227-8431—U.S. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors Inc., 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, OH 44870. Printed in the U.S.A.

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Subscriptions and customer service:
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Letters from Readers

Middle East Peace

To the Editor:

In "Israel's Moment of Truth" [February], Daniel Pipes misinterprets the peace process, seeing it as the headlong drive of defeatist, war-weary Israelis rather than as the hard-nosed pursuit of national interest that it really is. He might have paid greater attention to those Israelis, like myself, who are skeptical of Prime Minister Barak's haste on the Syrian track and would prefer instead an early agreement with the Palestinians.

The demographic time bomb on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (leaving aside fertility rates among Arabs within Israel) has already detonated. To rule the Palestinians indefinitely would constitute an insurmountable strategic liability. Quite apart from the qualms of bleeding-heart democrats over the apartheid-like political arrangements required by a policy of "Greater Israel," the country is simply incapable of providing the minimum level of social services, economic development, and municipal infrastructure needed by the burgeoning Palestinian population. Thus, while a Palestinian state would indeed raise long-term security concerns, holding on to "Greater Israel" would bring down the entire social and economic system like a house of cards, and is a dangerous fantasy.

This, finally, is the strategic ground on which the Oslo accords stand. Dreams of Jewish-Arab brotherhood, important as they may be, are mere ideological superstructure. Having set the process in motion, we Israelis ultimately must either carry it through to an agreed-upon settlement or reimpose our rule on the alleyways of Khan Yunis and the kasbah of Shechem.

Finally, with regard to Israel's "post-Zionist" malaise, much of the blame lies with 33 years of occupation, a mistake that has brought Israelis face-to-face with the darker side of the Zionist legacy. As one who "plays soldier" on reserve duty 30 days a year, I must confess that dragging Palestinian civilians out of their homes in the middle of the night in order to ensure a sense of normalcy in misplaced West Bank housing developments does nothing to promote the spirit of pioneering and self-sacrifice that inspired an older generation of Israelis.

Sam Shube
Jerusalem, Israel

To the Editor:

Any friend of Israel must be depressed by the gloomy picture that Daniel Pipes paints. But is the situation entirely bleak? Take, for instance, the immigration to Israel of over 800,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union. This influx has not only enriched Israel's scientific, intellectual, and musical life, but has also helped to correct the imbalance in population growth caused by the higher birthrate of Israeli Arabs, about which Mr. Pipes is rightly concerned.

Samuel L. Tennenbaum
Miami Beach, Florida

To the Editor:

Daniel Pipes's presentation of Israel's "moment of truth" is superb and wholly realistic. I agree with everything he says, except for the single egregious paragraph exculpating the American government for "the weakness of current Israeli policy." On the contrary, that weakness is a direct result of longstanding pressure from Washington.

Immediately after the Six-Day war of 1967, an American spokesman stated that the U.S. did not recognize Israel's right to the newly liberated territories, including east Jerusalem. Washington instead supported the United Nations' platitude concerning the "inadmissibility of territor-

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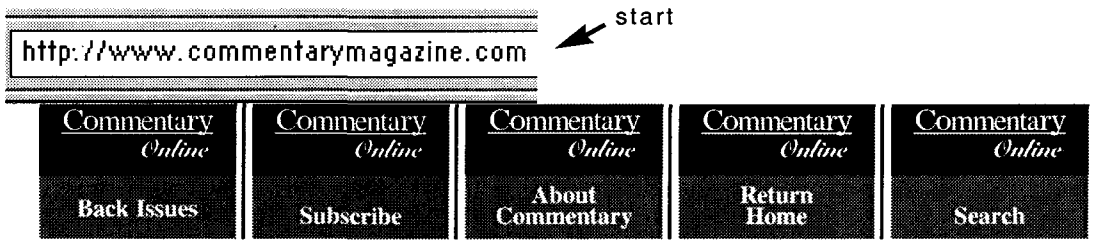

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ial expansion through war," a resolution aimed at Israel but at no other victorious country. Long before the current manifestations of Israel's infirmity, Washington had pushed it out of Sinai, out of Egypt proper, out of Sharm-el-Sheikh, Taba, Kuneitra (in the northern Golan), Hebron, and much of Samaria (the West Bank). What is certain is that it will now push Israel out of east Jerusalem, much of Judea, and all of Samaria, the Gaza region, and the Golan.

Despite its economic and military assistance to Israel, the U.S. has been totally, predictably, and implacably committed to the Arab side when it comes to claims to disputed territories.

SCHNEIR LEVIN
Johannesburg, South Africa

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Pipes's views are always refreshing, and his article on Israel's "moment of truth" is no exception. He failed, however, to explain the curious phenomenon of "fatigue" not within Israeli society at large but among the country's political leaders, past and present.

After all, it was the right-wing Menachem Begin who, having visited Washington, returned the entire Sinai peninsula and recognized a Palestinian entity. And it was the even more right-wing Yitzhak Shamir who went along with Secretary of State James Baker's "peace process" and started the negotiations that will result ultimately in a Palestinian state and Israel's return to its 1949 borders.

I can see only one explanation for this behavior: Israel's lack of genuine political sovereignty and its total dependence on the United States.

ARNON RIEGER
East Falmouth, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

What is notably absent from Daniel Pipes's intelligent analysis of Israel's "fatigue" and declining morale is the potentially catastrophic effect this development could have on the United States and other Western nations.

If Israel continues to take security risks because of its weariness with the implacable hatred of its neighbors and the opprobrium of the rest of world, the Arabs may be tempted to mount an all-out strike, threatening the nation's very existence. Should this happen, it is not hard to imagine a frantic Israel turning as a last resort to its nuclear, biological, and chemical arsenal, and taking aim at the people, infrastructure, and (of course) oil resources of the Arab states. Even if only for reasons of economic self-interest, the United States and NATO would have to become deeply involved.

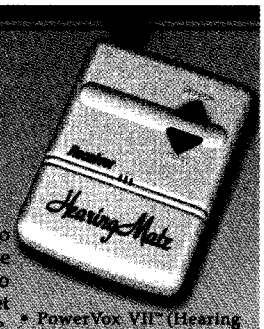
STANLEY P. KESSEL
Hollywood, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Pipes's assessment of Israel's future may be too optimistic. After 50 years of unending conflict, most Israeli Jews seem to have concluded that the burden of maintaining their nation is just too difficult to bear. The country's secular leftist elites—who control education, culture, the news media, and the government—blame the Jews for the Arabs' desire to destroy Israel, and the majority seems to be afflicted with the "Stockholm syndrome": though the victims of Arab hate, they identify with their oppressors.

As for the government, Prime Minister Barak seeks to make his tiny nation still smaller by giving away historically Jewish territory in exchange for worthless guarantees of peace. To him and Israel's other recent prime ministers, "negotiations" mean haggling over the size and timing of the next Israeli land giveaway, accepted by the Arabs with increasing contempt for a people who must appear to them to be without honor, self-respect, or national and religious pride.

GEORGE E. RUBIN
New York City



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TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Pipes is most insightful about the fatigue and self-doubt that have overtaken the average Israeli's view of Arab intolerance, terrorism, and war. In a recent interview in the *Jerusalem Post*, Ruth Wisse (another regular contributor to COMMENTARY) assessed this phenomenon against the backdrop of the "political strategies" that Jews for centuries had "honed as resident aliens in the Christian and Muslim worlds: try to accommodate your adversaries, and if they still don't like you, seek the fault in yourself." This "was a brilliant strategy," Wisse continued, "almost as startling in its originality as the concept of monotheism. There is only one problem with it; it doesn't work."

HANS FISHER
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Having lived in Israel for four years now, I must agree, unfortunately, with nearly everything Daniel Pipes says in his article. I would add, however, that Israelis are not the only ones whose views court danger. In the West generally, there is a great lack of understanding of how other peoples think and behave, and this is especially true with regard to militant Islam.

MLADEN ANDRIJASEVIC
Beer Sheva, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

For Israelis concerned about our country's ability to cope with the challenges it faces, Daniel Pipes's article is profoundly disturbing—and not only because of his cogent and illuminating analysis. The very fact that we can no longer expect such an article to be written in Hebrew by an Israeli academic or intellectual is yet another indication of the extent to which the country's moral strength has been sapped. We must turn to American friends for arguments of this kind and quality.

HILLAY ZMORA
Herzliya, Israel

DANIEL PIPES writes:

Sam Shube confirms my point about the weakness of Israelis when, in the course of arguing for "an early agreement with the Palestinians," he refers only to the needs of Israelis but says nothing about Palestinian readiness to end the conflict. I do not doubt that decades of military occupation have had a deleterious effect on Israel; my point, however, is that the critical factor in the decision to withdraw should not be Israel's longing to leave but Palestinian readiness to live in peace.

Samuel L. Tennenbaum counters my point about declining Jewish demographics by noting the influx of 800,000 Russians to Israel in recent years. Without even taking up the issue of how Jewish many of the immigrants are, that influx is probably a one-time epi-

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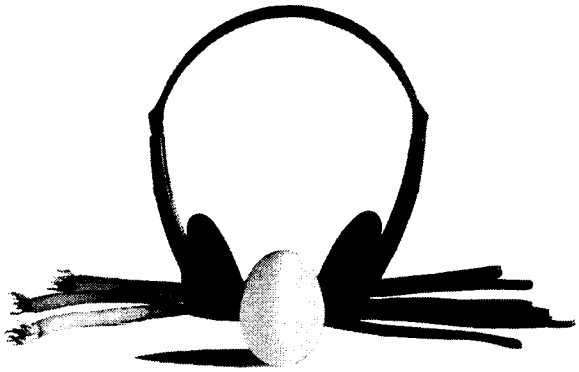

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sode, and it can do very little in the long term to counter the much higher Muslim birthrate.

I appreciate the kind words of Schneir Levin and Arnon Rieger, but I stick by my argument that the problem of Israel's weak policies lies in its body politic and not (as the former would have it) in the United States or (as the latter contends) in Israel's politicians. These are consoling views but not accurate ones.

To blame the United States, Israel's one stalwart and powerful friend, for Israeli weakness is a bit of a stretch. American officials make the case—one I agree with—that when they get involved in negotiations, they are doing what the Israeli government wants. Blaming Israeli politicians likewise misses the point, for they are basically executing a popular mandate. Put it this way: had the Israeli public a year ago warmed to the hardline candidacy of Benny Begin and elected him prime minister in May 1999, what the State Department or what Barak, Netanyahu, and others want would have had little import. In fact, Begin bowed out of the race with some 3 percent of the vote going his way. The people spoke.

Stanley P. Kessel, George E. Rubin, and Hans Fisher largely agree with me, if in even stronger language than I employed, and I thank them for their comments. I certainly concur, too, with Mladen Andrijasevic's point that Europeans and Americans, no less than Israelis, have an imperfect understanding of Islam. Finally, Hillay Zmora's note I find sad and affecting. Has it, indeed, come to this?

Catch-22

TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz wonders why James Webb—a graduate of the Naval Academy, a decorated hero of the Vietnam war, and a former Secretary of the Navy—and the cadets at the Air Force Academy admire Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* ["Looking Back at *Catch-22*," February]. The explanation is quite simple. Like Mr. Podhoretz himself, they appreciate the truth. The fact that the truth about military life is often ludicrously comical—as Heller shows with his hyperbolic, satirical prose—diminishes not one whit the courage and patriotism of either Heller or his enthusiasts among our military officers. Nor should we be surprised that radical leftists misuse *Catch-22*. Do they not deconstruct and disfigure everything virtuous?

I first read *Catch-22* shortly after graduating from the Naval Academy in 1962, and, like James Webb, I discovered in Heller a soulmate—an evaluation unchanged by a recent rereading of his book. The service academies train future officers to function amid the foibles, ambiguities, and contradictions of war. This is necessary not only because the military has its share of latent and actual asses, fools, psychos, and egoists, but because war itself often requires men to act in ways opposed to their primal instinct for survival and their most elevated sense of morality.

These are paradoxes with which an officer must cope, and Heller learned them, presumably, on the battlefields of World War II. In *Catch-22*, he provided a magnificent textbook for

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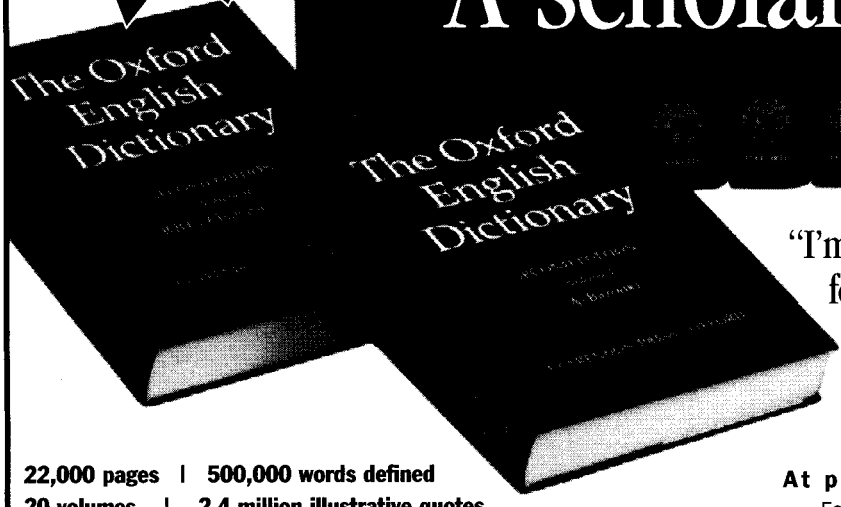

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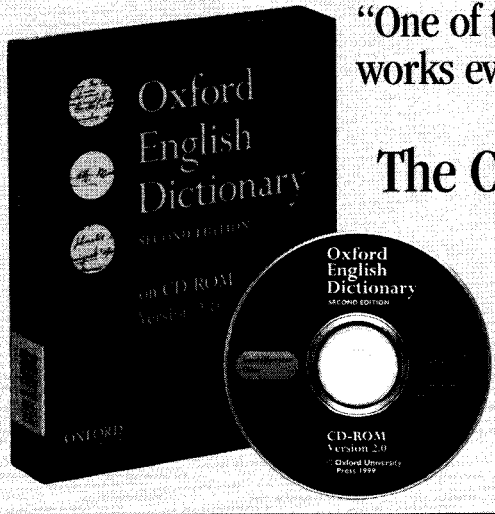

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CHARLES W. CLARDY
Decherd, Tennessee

TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz is determined to condemn *Catch-22* as an attack on the altruistic effort to destroy the Third Reich and, more broadly, as a damnable deterrent to legitimate patriotism in the event that war again poses a threat to our way of life.

But Mr. Podhoretz is mistaken to assume that the American troops who fought on European soil were imbued with the belief that fascism had to be destroyed. Those who were in the killing fields were rarely, if ever, told why, or where they were, or where they were going. To conscripted soldiers in combat, the war was a succession of rain, snow, shelling, ambush, fear, and death; it did not look the same to them as it did to ambitious generals, the purveyors of materiel, or wives and mothers divested of their precious kin. To see *their* war, I would highly recommend *Catch-22*.

AARON JACOBSON
Cleveland, Ohio

TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz's cogent clarification of *Catch-22*'s message and his challenge to Joseph Heller's view of World War II were overdue. During many years of counseling conscientious objectors and war-resisters, I experienced the change of "consciousness" that *Catch-22* helped produce. The "pacifists" among them had just begun to sort out the moral and political choices involved in participation in war. Many had no sense of what could be lost in a refusal to go to war. Even fewer understood war's utility: it settles an argument until the groundwork can be laid for institutions that make a shared political community a feasible alternative to conflict.

More thoughtful pacifists—among whom I count myself—understand why democratic governance in America is an important milestone in human history, and that simplistic opposition to American militarism is no road to peace. Absent America, we would have to forget about progress toward an end to war.

ROBERT PICKUS
Berkeley, California

TO THE EDITOR:

In 1967, when my son was sixteen years old, I was desperate to get him involved in books, so I offered him *Catch-22*, a novel I had read a few years earlier and laughed uproariously over. Magically, my prescription worked. He loved the book. Those were the Vietnam years, and one of my thoughts was to keep my son safe: Heller's cynicism had great appeal.

As the years passed and I grew older and wiser, I was nagged by Heller's insouciant message. World War II was not Vietnam, nor was it like any prior conflict.

There was a murderous nation on the loose that had to be stopped, and all the sophistry in Heller's arsenal could not lessen the evil of the Germans. As a Jew, Heller should have been sensitive to the slaughter of his people. Instead, he fashioned a novel about the war as if it involved no moral imperative.

JUDITH HIRSCH
Boca Raton, Florida

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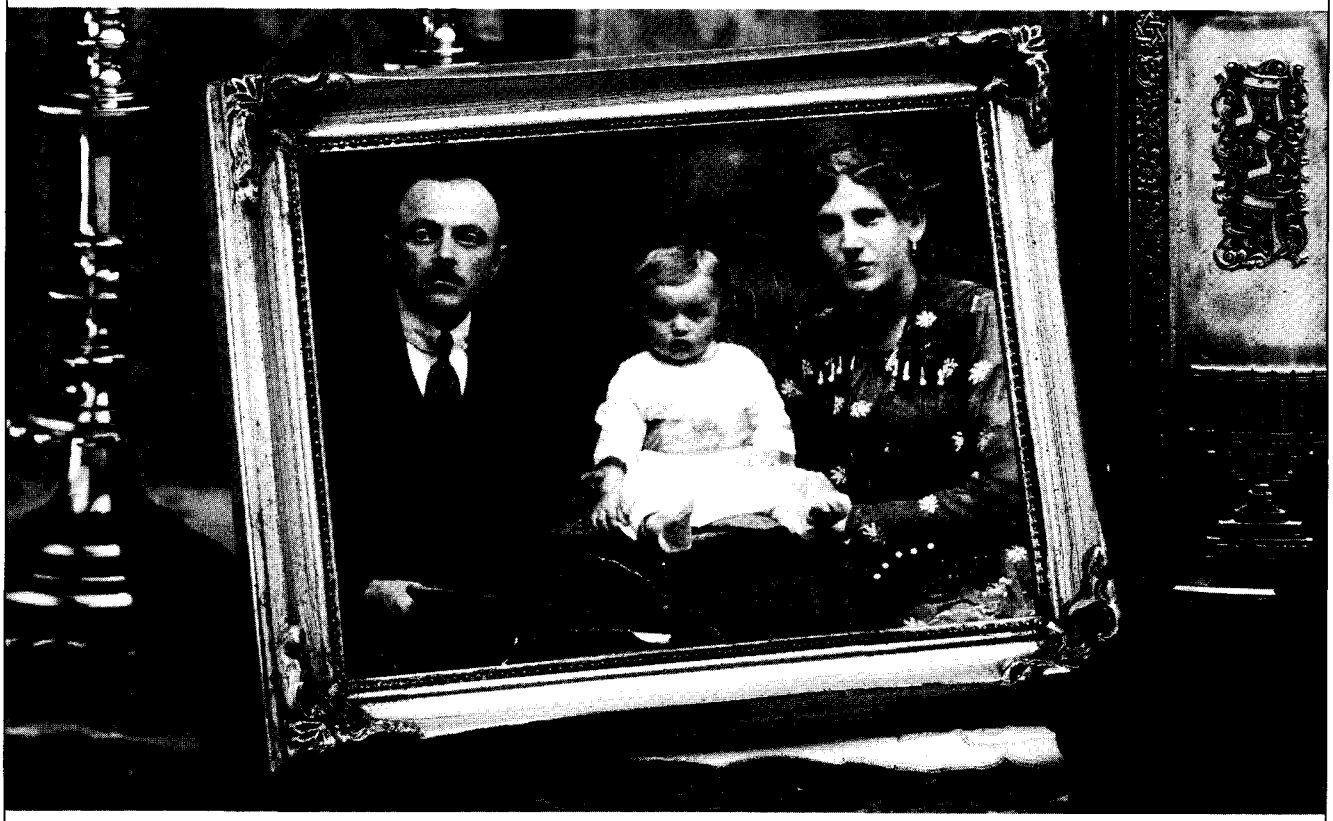

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TO THE EDITOR:

I was startled and delighted finally to run across someone who agrees with me about *Catch-22*. I thought I stood alone in my distaste. As a combat veteran who served in Europe (as a gunner on a B-24), I get no pleasure from those who use World War II for low comedy or to air their grievances.

My daughter was entranced by *Catch-22*, so I had to explain to her that there have been all sorts of wars, most of them deserving of our contempt. World War II was not among them.

LOUIS S. LYONS
Woodland Hills, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Hurrah to Norman Podhoretz for pinning the tail on Joseph Heller. If most American fighting men in World War II had had the advanced sensibilities of Heller's "hero" Yossarian, forces far meaner and more real than Colonel Cathcart would have prevailed.

LARRY THORNBERRY
Tampa, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz has written a brilliant essay on Joseph Heller. But while I would like to agree that "the anti-military ethos . . . has grown weaker and less pervasive," I suspect that it will return in force as soon as an American military adventure requires more from the public than high television ratings. As President Clinton has demonstrated, the Left has no objections to the use of force, even if it is used clumsily and indiscriminately as in Sudan or Kosovo, so long as the other side does all the bleeding. Lord help us if we ever have to fight, instead of kill.

THOMAS F. BERNER
New York City

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

Instead of replying to the arguments of Charles W. Clardy myself, I would rather refer him to the excellent letters following his from Robert Pickus, Judith Hirsch, Larry Thornberry, and Thomas F. Berner.

I will add only this: having served in the army for two years as an enlisted man, I know very well (perhaps even better than an officer might) how absurd military life can be. But as I tried to point out in my article, that is far from the whole story.

Never having been sent into combat, though, let me suggest that Aaron Jacobson turn to Louis S. Lyons, who had first-hand experience, for a more authoritative answer than I could supply. Like Mr. Clardy, Mr. Jacobson is not wrong in what he says, but he too gives us an incomplete picture. (By the way, some of the writings of Stephen Ambrose do much to fill out the picture without denying or obscuring the partial truth of the Jacobson account of how conscripted soldiers felt on the front lines in World War II.)

The Balkans

TO THE EDITOR:

Aleksa Djilas's essay on Yugoslavia ["Milosevic's Realm," February] is a blatant piece of propaganda aimed at glossing over the image that Serbia has earned by waging bloody wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

The article follows the familiar paradigm of the latest Serb apologists. First, try to soften the tyrannical image of Slobodan Milosevic: he was, according to Mr. Djilas, a product of chaotic post-Tito Yugoslavia; he cannot be compared to Stalin; he is a humble fellow; he is a war criminal but his crimes are indirect and, therefore, cannot be proven; and, finally, many others (Mr. Djilas cites Bosnia's Franjo Tudjman and Alija Izetbegovic, Albanian KLA leaders, various intellectuals, and even Madeleine Albright) are equally or almost equally guilty.

Minimizing Serbian crimes by pointing to the crimes of others is likewise part of the new (and yet so old) Serbian

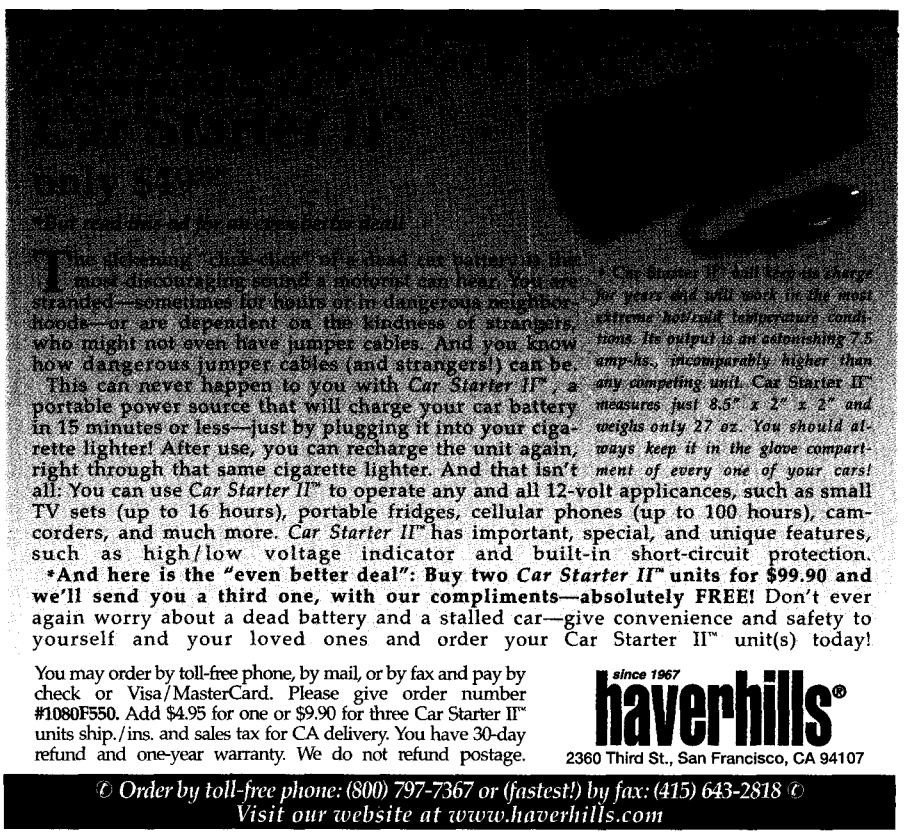
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image-making effort. Thus, according to Mr. Djilas, only a small number of Kosovar Albanians were killed by Serbs, but he readily repeats the myth that "all Serb villages [in Croatia] were burned to the ground and the few thousand Serbs who had remained in Krajina were slaughtered." He simply forgets to mention such Serb actions as the mass exterminations in Vukovar and Srebrenica, the deadly concentration camps, the bombing of many villages, and the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia.

Mr. Djilas's assertion that the "majority of Serbian and Croatian politicians . . . fully supported the armed struggle for the establishment of, respectively, greater Serbia and greater Croatia" is simply another attempt at spreading blame. In the 1990's, all Serb political parties, cultural institutions, the Serbian Orthodox Church, leading intellectuals (with a few exceptions), and the vast majority of the populace supported the goal of creating a greater Serbia.

By contrast, among the Croats only Tudjman and some segments of his party embarked on the policy of dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is well-established that Tudjman's Bosnia policy was rejected by all other political parties, by Bosnian cultural institutions, and by the leadership of the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia. The overwhelming victory of the opposition in the recent elections in Croatia is a clear indication of what the citizenry thought of Tudjman's policies.

Mr. Djilas also employs the old myth of how "gallant little Serbia" stood up to evil giants in the not so distant past. But this cannot be treated seriously by anyone familiar with modern Balkan history. Serb nationalists sparked World War I in order to "unite all the Serbs." They collaborated with the occupiers—especially the Italian fascists—during World War II for the same reason. They tried yet again to achieve the same goals by the same means in the last decade. The two major constants in Serbia's modern political history are the drive for foreign expansion and the bloody domestic struggle for power.

Mr. Djilas and other Serb apologists hope to create a better image of Serbia and Serbs in the West by means of historical revisionism. But they are in denial about the fact that Serbia was the instigator of the recent bloodshed in the Balkans. Whitewashing the facts and justifying evil with evil will help neither the Serbs nor their skeptical neighbors, who know Milosevic was not the sole author of the latest horrors in the region, but simply a wicked man who grabbed his chance to ride the wave of Serbian expansionism.

ANTE CUVALO
President, Alliance of Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the USA
Joliet, Illinois

ALEKSA DJILAS writes:

Ante Cuvalo appears to forget that my essay was primarily a favorable review of a book by Dusko Doder and Louise Branson. It is these two veteran correspondents who underline that not only Milosevic but also Croatia's president Franjo Tudjman and Bosnia's Muslim leader Alija Izetbegovic are responsible for the civil war and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. I agreed with them, adding that Milosevic's guilt was "beyond question" and that he should give up power and be brought to justice. If I tried to show that Milosevic is a more complex figure than the one portrayed in the American media, this was only in the spirit of Alexander Pope's advice to be "humanly severe" and "gladly praise the merit of a foe." Amazingly, Mr. Cuvalo considers my condemnation a "blatant piece of propaganda" for Milosevic and Serbia.

I agree with what Mr. Cuvalo says about the strength of Serbian nationalism in the 1990's, but he is too generous in his treatment of the Croatian political elite. Ivo Banac, a professor of history at Yale and the leading Croatian human-rights activist, states with exemplary honesty that in Croatia, "'big' opposition parties, a considerable part of the intelligentsia, and the majority of Catholic public figures" accepted Tudjman's program of ethnically cleansing Croatia of its Serbian minority and annexing parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

No serious historian today, not even in Germany or Austria, blames World War I on Serbian nationalism as Mr. Cuvalo does. As Donald Kagan rightly pointed out in the October 1999 COMMENTARY, "The consensus today is that the deeper causes of the war are to be seen in Germany's ambitions to become the dominant force on the European continent and a world power equal to or greater than Britain." As for the compliments Serbia earned from its allies (the United States, Britain, and France) during and after World War I, these were well deserved. Its military losses were ap-

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palling—according to neutral estimates, two-and-a-half times higher in relative terms than those of France.

Then there is World War II. It is simply ludicrous to assert that during that war Italian fascists promoted the cause of Greater Serbia. To the contrary, Mussolini supported the Croatian fascists, who in October 1934 had organized the murder of King Aleksandar of Yugoslavia during a state visit to France. Aleksandar, who was from the Serbian Karadjordjevic dynasty, was unquestionably a dictator, but he was also an antifascist and a philo-Semite. After Nazi Germany and fascist Italy defeated and dismembered Yugoslavia in April 1941, Croatian fascists and their leader Ante Pavelic came to Zagreb from their camps in Italy and established a Croatian puppet state. They then started a reign of terror in which, according to conservative estimates, between 200,000 and 300,000 Serbs and Jews perished. It is true that individual Italian officers sometimes protected those unfortunates from being massacred. Is such admirable human decency to be regarded as support for Greater Serbia?

Finally, the countries adjacent to Serbia do indeed have every right to be skeptical about their neighbor. But so does Serbia about them. Serbia today contains about a million refugees, more than any country in Europe; they were expelled from Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

Rocking the Cradle

TO THE EDITOR:

Disdainful of every piece of American Jewish music to the left of Berlin's "God Bless America," Terry Teachout ["*Cradle* of Lies," February] dispatches Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* to the dustbin wherein also reside Kurt Weill, Aaron Copland, and Leonard Bernstein. But in doing so, Mr. Teachout makes three misjudgments.

First, he speaks of an "ongoing recovery" of the American economy in 1937. There was an upward turn after FDR's second election, but it was hardly "ongoing" since it fell flat by 1938, rising again only with the advent of war in 1939. Second, he seems to approve of bills of attainder—i.e., the restrictions aimed specifically at *Cradle* after its initial approval by the Federal Theater Project; surely, Mr. Teachout is aware of American distaste for such actions, beginning with the rebuff of the Alien and Sedition Acts in the 18th century. Last, he claims that Howard da Silva "worked regularly for the rest of his life" after playing Larry Foreman in *Cradle*. Not so. Da Silva was banned from movies, and as for stage, I distinctly recall his spending a couple of years with the Chagrin Valley Little Theater—a theater that has never "regularly" employed anyone, except possibly its bookkeeper, who tracks the deficits.

HAROLD TICKTIN
Cleveland, Ohio

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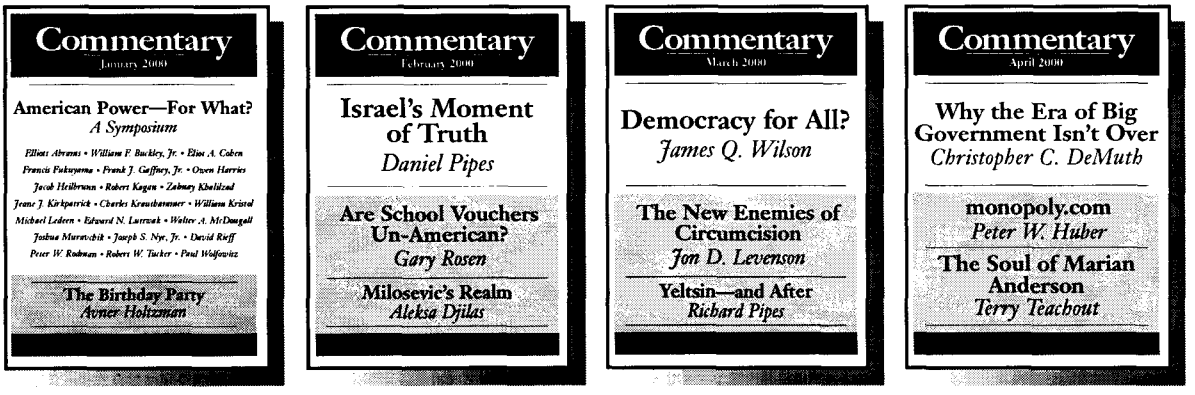

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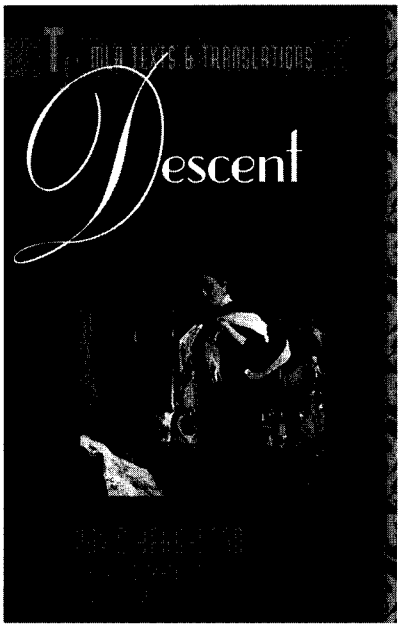

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— Sander L. Gilman
University of Chicago

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Among Yiddish prose writers of the early twentieth century, **DOVID BERGELSON** (1884–1952) was a unique modernist voice. Born in Russia, he lived and traveled in Europe and the United States, but he finally moved to Moscow: in a world of conflicting ideologies and political unrest, he threw his lot in with Communism and the Soviet Union. He was executed in a post–World War II Stalinist purge of Jews.

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TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout performs a valuable service by providing a more balanced view of the controversies surrounding the original performance of *The Cradle Will Rock*. But in his anti-Stalinist zeal (which I share), I believe he steps over the line.

First, he commits a sleight-of-hand when he asserts that, "outside of Hollywood and the academy, one would have to search far and wide to locate defenders of a political system whose sole achievement was the butchery of several million innocent human beings." If this statement is meant to imply retrospectively that Marc Blitzstein as well as the Communists and sympathizers of his day (circa late 20's to early 40's) were aware of the killings going on in the Soviet Union, I believe that Mr. Teachout is wrong. I do not believe they knew, or, more to the point, wished to know of Stalin's horrors.

Second, the statement that Stalin was "the foremost mass murderer of modern times" is pushing the envelope. Perversions of justice, yes; execution of innocents, yes; forced-collectivization evils, yes; gulags, yes; but crematoria, no.

HARRY I. GREENFIELD
Wheaton, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout is correct when he describes as "harebrained" the theory set out in *The Cradle Will Rock* that the postwar success of Abstract Expressionism can be attributed in large part to the actions of the CIA or corporate America.

After the war, many artists who did representational work suffered greatly. Fine ones, including Jack Levine, Paul Cadmus, Ben Shahn, Jacob Lawrence, and George Tooker were not involved in museum shows, nor was their work critically acclaimed.

It was the movers and shakers of the art world who made this happen. The critics, the curators, and the professors—mostly liberals—promoted only abstract work, to the point that two generations of artists were uncomfortable painting the human figure itself. It is the height of revisionist idiocy to suggest that these changes in the art world occurred because of the influence of large corporations, let alone the CIA or Congress.

PHILIP J. SCHILLER
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

In his insightful critique of the movie version of *The Cradle Will Rock*, Terry Teachout goes to considerable lengths to describe the political atmosphere of the period in which Diego Rivera's fresco was razed from the wall of Rockefeller Center because it contained a portrait of Lenin. It is interesting to recall that during the same period, another fresco by Rivera at the Detroit Institute of Art, depicting the spiritual challenge of the Machine Age, was slated for destruction on similarly specious grounds. But discussion about the fresco's removal became a tempest in a teapot, and happily it remains intact and on view today.

MILTON ALBERT
Baltimore, Maryland

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

Harold Ticktin's letter made me laugh out loud. Regular readers of COMMENTARY will hardly need reminding that I have bestowed lavish and heartfelt praise on Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland, both here and elsewhere, and while I have never had occasion to write about Kurt Weill, I admire him no less deeply. The rest of Mr. Ticktin's poison-pen letter should be read in the light of its author's clumsily obvious intention to smear me as a crypto-anti-Semite; it seems

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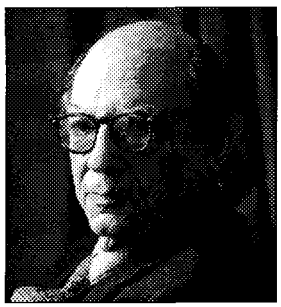

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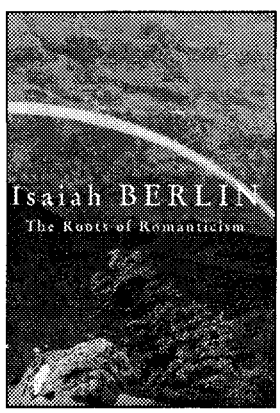

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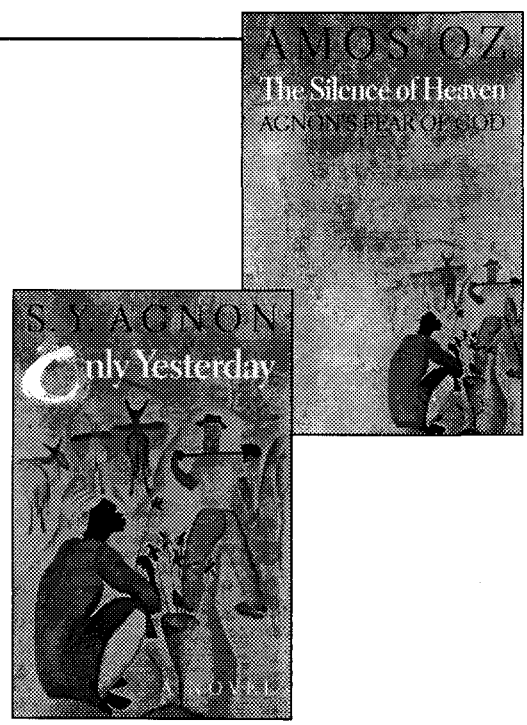

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the hard cultural Left has not changed much in the past six decades.

As for Marc Blitzstein, it may possibly be, as Harry I. Greenfield suggests, that he knew less than he should have—or more than he wanted—about precisely what was happening in the abattoirs of the KGB circa 1937. But as Eric A. Gordon records in *Mark the Music: The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein*, the composer of *The Cradle Will Rock* "endorsed the [Communist] party's diatribes against [the exiled Leon] Trotsky without question and happily distanced himself from John Dewey's anti-Stalinist commission of inquiry by signing an open statement of support for the Moscow Trials." That was in 1938, the same year he joined the Communist party. Countless other intellectuals understood the moral implications of making such a commitment; there is no reason why Blitzstein should not have known, too.

Buchanan, Etc.

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld tries to defend his assault on Patrick Buchanan's *A Republic, Not an Empire* [Letters from Readers, March] from the thoughtful criticisms of some of your readers. In the course of his response, Mr. Schoenfeld singles me out for attack in an attempt to destroy Buchanan's reputation.

First, unavoidably, the matter of my credentials. Mr. Schoenfeld implies that they are subminimal, referring to me as a professor of "social-studies education" at Buffalo State College. In fact, I am and have been for many years a professor of history at that school, in the department of history and social-studies education. My Ph.D. is from the University of Chicago, where F.A. Hayek served as the head of my dissertation committee.

In my essay "Rethinking Churchill," which so incensed Mr. Schoenfeld, I apply the standards of classical liberalism in arriving at my rather harsh judgment of that eminent welfare-statist and war-lover (who, I grudgingly agree with Mr. Schoenfeld, is "a figure of somewhat greater historical stature" than my own). "Rethinking Churchill" is 40 pages long and includes 169 footnotes; a few of them cite David Irving, which Mr. Schoenfeld finds scandalous. But if the eminent historian Gordon Craig can find Irving's work highly useful, why can't I? In any case, there are more references to John Charmley, Clive Pointing, A.J.P. Taylor, Tuvia Ben-Moshe, and others than to David Irving.

The single historical episode Mr. Schoenfeld mentions in his attack on me is the terror-bombing of Germany. It did, indeed, as I stated, involve the annihilation of an ancient urban culture and the massacre of some 600,000 civilians from the air. Yet Mr. Schoenfeld still seems to think this action was morally irreproachable. He should read the memorandum Churchill sent to British bomber command following the destruction of Dresden, attempting to shift the blame. While he is at it, Mr. Schoenfeld might try to correct some of his grossly distorted impressions of the opponents of the war in 1940-41, who, he holds, were "dangerous fools," if not outright anti-Semites and Nazis. Mr. Schoenfeld would clearly benefit from reading Bill Kauffman's *America First! Its History, Culture, and Politics* with a foreword by Gore Vidal.

RALPH RAICO
Buffalo State College
Buffalo, New York

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD writes:

Ralph Raico is wrong to say that I singled him out for attack in my "attempt to destroy Buchanan's reputation." I did not single him out for anything. In fact, in my initial article I did not mention him at all. It was only after some of my critics raised the issue of Buchanan's footnotes that I called attention to Mr. Raico and his work. Now, after thanking him for setting the record straight about the credentials that landed him a post in the department of history and social-studies education at Buffalo State College, let me turn to his substantive points.

In the March issue of COMMENTARY I wrote that Mr. Raico impugns "Winston Churchill with words that should properly be applied to Adolf Hitler." In his letter, Mr. Raico now calls Churchill a "war-lover," reaffirming what I said he said. He then raises questions about the morality of strategic bombing in World War II. This is a legitimate subject for debate, but I do not regard Mr. Raico as a legitimate interlocutor in such a discussion, particularly since his own writings in this area draw uncritically on the research of David Irving, which he endorses here as "highly useful."

In the March exchange, I cited a number of Irving's obscene comments about Auschwitz. Mr. Raico has read these words, and they clearly have not given him any pause whatsoever. What is more, the full corpus of Irving's scholarship, including the works praised in the past by Gordon Craig and others, has recently been subjected to systematic scrutiny by a team of leading historians in connection with Irving's failed libel suit against the American historian Deborah Lipstadt. The results, upheld by a British court, are devastating to a reputation that was never much to begin with. From the very inception of his career, including the book that first gained him attention, *The Destruction of Dresden* (1963), Irving has been shown to have systematically engaged in various kinds of scholarly fraud, from the deliberate mistranslation of German words and phrases, to the deliberate dropping or falsifying of footnotes, to the deliberate omitting, suppressing, misrepresenting, twisting, or otherwise cooking of relevant documents in the service of his revisionist agenda.

David Irving, it is now completely apparent, is not a historian at all but a charlatan and neo-Nazi sympathizer. Those like Mr. Raico who continue, at this late date, to rely on Irving's productions or to claim to see merit in them only call into serious question their own credentials and motives.

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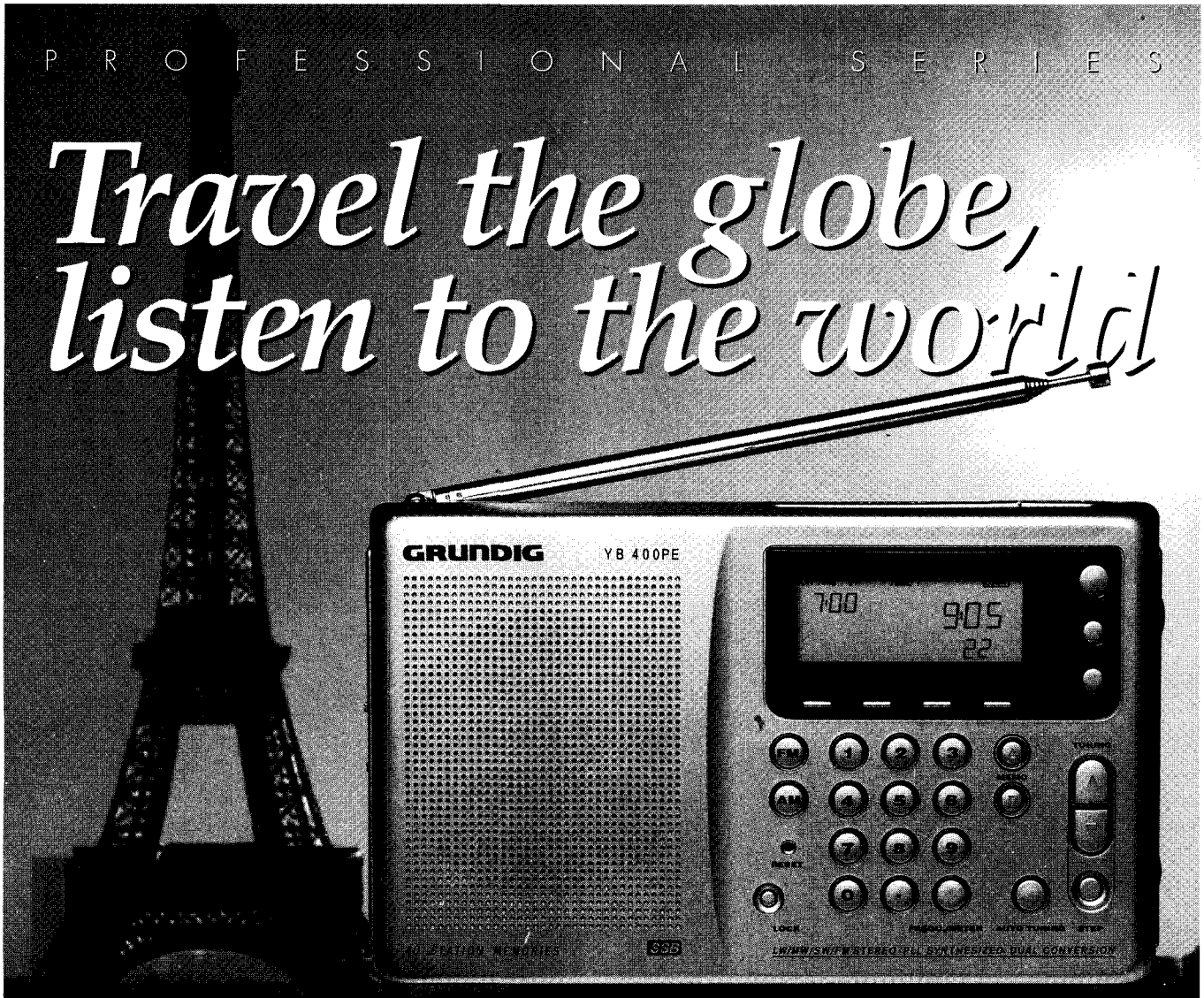

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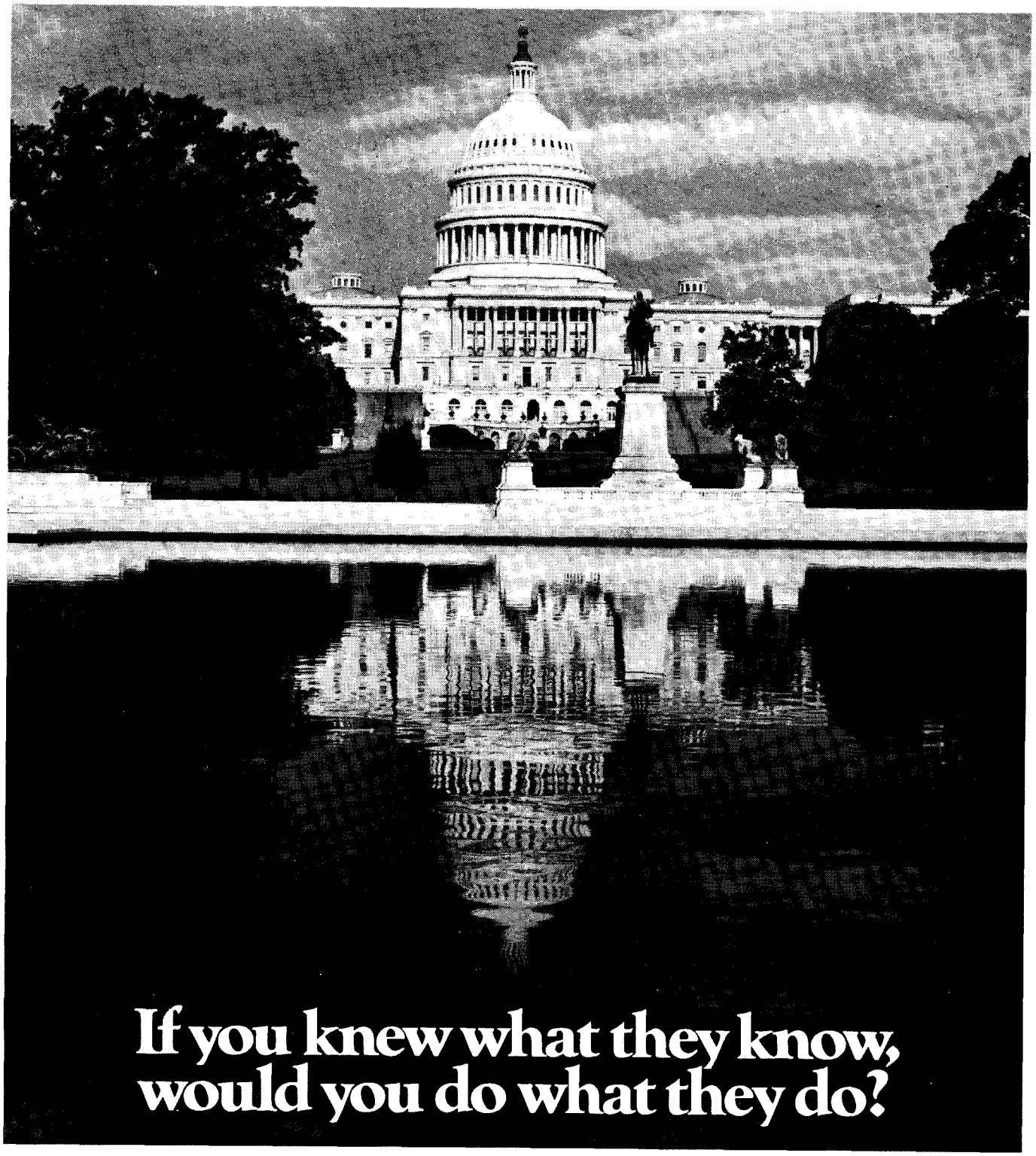

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Commentary
May 2000

The Election and the Culture Wars

Gertrude Himmelfarb

A FUNNY thing happened on the way to the presidential nominations this year. We discovered not only that the candidates were not quite what we thought them to be (this happens in all electoral campaigns; it is why we have them). We also discovered, with the dramatic emergence of religious conservatives in the Republican campaign, that America is not quite what many of us had persuaded ourselves it had become.

America today is undoubtedly, as pollsters and analysts assure us, a prosperous, contented, and optimistic place. Employment is at an all-time high, crime and welfare, if not at all-time lows, are considerably lower than they have been for years, and wondrous feats are being performed by science in curing disease and prolonging life (with still more wondrous feats promised for the future). If other social indices—out-of-wedlock births, the rapidly rising rate of cohabitation, violence and vulgarity on TV, pornography and sexual perversion on the Internet—are not quite so favorable, they pale in significance. This is partly because we have become inured to them, and partly because they have been overshadowed by two momentous developments.

The first is the new Gilded Age that has been ushered in by the information economy. This Gilded Age is more gilded, more affluent, than its prototype at the end of the 19th century—wealth today is measured in billions rather than millions. It is also more democratic, because its blessings are accessible to many more people, most dramatically young people. And it is all the more fortunate because it is accompanied by a new Era of Good Feelings, marked not so much by the alleviation of political strife (which gave that label to the administration of President James Monroe) as by the diminution of social strife.

Or so, at least, we have been given to understand by a good many commentators and sociologists. As they see it, the spirit of divisiveness and contentiousness brought into our national life by the upheavals of the 1960's is today but a dim memory; some even look back on that decade nostalgically as a time of adolescent high-spiritedness. And with the 60's presumed to be behind us, so, too, are the culture wars, the long-drawn-out struggle for the soul of America between traditionalists on the one hand and the apostles of liberation on the other—what Lionel Trilling called the adversary culture.

From this perspective, the culture wars are as obsolete as the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Indeed, the culture wars have undergone the same kind of historical revisionism as the cold war. Just as the United States is held responsible for the cold war, so the culture wars are said to be the invention of intellectuals, a

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battle in which the American people themselves have had no part. The only commitment of Americans, we are told, is to the principle of tolerance; this is the first and only commandment in our national Decalogue.

This view of the culture wars was sorely tried by the primary campaign, when Pat Robertson, the head of the Christian Coalition, launched a moral and religious crusade against Senator John McCain. On February 19, McCain went down to resounding defeat in South Carolina, provoking him to an equally passionate denunciation of the "forces of evil" among his opponents, including Robertson. By the time the dust settled on Super Tuesday, McCain was out of the race, and we had all received a vivid reminder that America is a more complicated, diverse, and morally charged place than we had been led to think.

RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM, it is now evident, has survived both the new Gilded Age and the new Era of Good Feelings. Its main organization, the Christian Coalition, has fallen upon hard times, to be sure, and some in the movement, including Jerry Falwell, have publicly retreated from the political sphere. But the first law of religious movements in America is that as one organization or sect dies, another quickly takes its place.

When the Moral Majority disbanded in the late 1980's, reputable historians and journalists were quick to pronounce, with an audible sigh of relief, the death of religious conservatism. Within months, the Christian Coalition had emerged to rekindle the suspicions and fears of those same critics. A decade later, the Christian Coalition too seemed moribund—only to be revived, temporarily at least, by the Republican campaign. And if this organization too eventually succumbs, it will no doubt be succeeded by another.

In any event, religious conservatism itself is undeniably alive and well. And not just in South Carolina but, as subsequent primaries demonstrated, in other states as well, including those where the religious Right has never been a particularly powerful force. And not only among evangelicals but among all religious denominations, including Catholics. Even politicians and academics of an essentially secular temper unwittingly testify to the influence of religious conservatism when they appeal to "Americanism" as a "faith," a "civic religion."

We have always known that the United States is unique in the strength and prevalence of its religious beliefs and practices—this, after all, is one of our main claims to being "exceptional." What is interesting is how durable this exceptionality of ours has been. In his new book, *The Fourth Great Awakening*, Robert Fogel estimates, on the basis of 1988 data, that there are something like 60 million adherents of "enthusiastic religion" in the country—about one-third of the electorate. The largest number of these belong to Protestant denominations loosely characterized as evangelical, but included among them are many mainline Protestants, born-again Catholics, and Mormons. A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC survey released in the midst of the recent primary campaign showed one in five Americans identifying themselves as born-again Christians.

Senator McCain has good reason to appreciate the strength of these religious conservatives. But so does Governor George W. Bush, who has had to expend precious resources to counteract the effect of his appearance at Bob Jones University, which has made no secret of its hostility to Catholicism. This episode was exploited by McCain and will, no doubt, continue to be exploited by Vice President Al Gore. As the *Wall Street Journal* concluded from its poll, Catholics "are up for grabs in the general election. . . . It may not be an exaggeration to say that whichever presidential candidate captures the Catholic vote in the fall will win the election."

This is far from being an issue just for Republicans. Gore is also vulnerable, not only from Catholics, who are no longer securely in the Democratic camp, but from evangelicals as well, another potential swing vote. Surveys in the early spring had Bush and Gore running dead even among all adults—but with born-again Christians favoring Bush by more than two to one.

Politicians may not appreciate just how varied this group is—not only theologically and denominationally but also socially and politically. In one survey, only one-third of evangelicals identified themselves with the religious Right; in another, only a fifth did. Among those evangelicals who did not associate themselves with the religious Right, almost half were Democrats. Although most adherents of the religious Right are Republicans, as many as 40 percent of those characterized as "religious conservatives" voted Democratic in the congressional elections of 1998. Moreover, many traditionally-minded Democrats who have little or no religious affiliation often find themselves allied with religious conservatives on one issue or another.

These complicated facts may help explain why no candidate presuming to speak for religious conservatives as a single bloc—and still less for social conservatives in general—has made much headway in our politics, as Gary Bauer learned to his dis-

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tress. But they also suggest that Gore will have to think about who else is listening as he makes his hard-core liberal appeals to his hard-core constituencies of trade unionists, African-Americans, and feminists. He may well have been chortling at the sight of Republican candidates being torn apart by religious dissension. But he could face a similar problem if he continues to be neglectful or dismissive of the religious and social conservatives in his own party, let alone in the country at large.

That Gore has been aware of this dilemma is evident from his waffling response last summer to the decision by the Kansas State Board of Education to permit local schools to teach or not to teach evolution as they see fit. At first, like Bush, Gore said simply that this was a matter for local authorities to decide; but within a few days he had reversed himself and announced his opposition to the Kansas board. By the time the primaries arrived, he was vying with Senator Bill Bradley as to who could appear the more liberal, the more progressive, the more secular. It will be interesting to see whether he persists in this strategy as the presidential campaign moves into full swing. President Clinton is a master at changing course; his Vice President may not be so adept.

This, in short, has been a more instructive primary season than most, for it has obliged us once again to take the measure of our country. What we have witnessed is not a political war in the usual sense—a war waged first among the several factions within each party and then between the two parties. Nor is it, more ominously, a *Kulturkampf*, a religious war that threatens to alter the longstanding relations of church and state. It is something more than the first and less than the second—a new episode in the culture wars that, contrary to the predictions of some, continue to engage us as they have for almost a half-century.

True, these wars have subsided in recent years, but—unlike the cold war—they have not gone away. True, too, Americans have never been more prosperous than they are today, and they have sound reason to be contented and optimistic. But good times and good feelings have not dulled their moral and religious sensibilities. The Gilded Age, it is evident, does not satisfy all human needs or solve all social problems. Nor do Good Feelings nullify or transcend deeply held values and beliefs.

Today, as for some time now, social and religious conservatives constitute a minority of the population. But it is a significant minority—a "dissident culture," I have called it. That culture cuts across political, racial, ethnic, even religious lines. And it takes many forms, from membership in organized groups like the Christian Coalition to the spontaneous actions of families who, in one way or another, and for one reason or another (often purely secular ones), choose to opt out of the dominant culture. There are now over a million children who are being home-schooled, and as many or more families that are "TV abstainers."

This dissident, minority culture can be disproportionately influential. It may be quiescent on the national level while active on a local level, as in the Kansas school-board case. But if challenged, it does not hesitate to emerge on the national level as well, in response, most notably, to Supreme Court decisions that go against the grain of traditional customs and beliefs, or to politicians who are not respectful of those customs and beliefs.

It is a tribute to the American people that the two cultures have been able to live together for so long, with periods of tension and dissension but without civil strife or political disruption. In the heat of the campaign this past January and February, the conflict between them flared up again—briefly, but dramatically and, for Senator McCain's candidacy, perhaps decisively. It has died down now that we have returned to a more normal mode of politics; but it will not, at least in the foreseeable future, disappear.

Public figures, religious and political alike, cannot refrain from recognizing and responding to the serious issues at stake in these culture wars; indeed, they have a duty to recognize and respond to them. But they also have a duty to exercise prudence and discretion so as not to exacerbate conflict into open warfare. This, too, is a lesson of the primary campaign, and it may prove to be a lesson of the election as well.

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Will We Abandon Taiwan?

Aaron L. Friedberg

OVER THE past decade, the American foreign-policy establishment has been preoccupied above all with the aftereffects of the collapse of the Soviet empire in Europe. But meanwhile, in Asia, the ground has been laid for a potentially deadly confrontation between the United States and the People's Republic of China. The most probable cause of such a confrontation is an issue to which, until very recently, only a handful of experts have devoted any attention and about which our political leaders have spoken scarcely a word: the fate of the people of Taiwan.

Taiwan has now held its second presidential election, and, with the victory on March 18 of Chen Shui-bian and the Democratic Progressive party, it has cleared what is usually regarded as the final hurdle on the road to stable democracy: the peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another. That this event has been greeted in Washington more with fear than with admiration is both troubling and revealing. Indeed, the relationship of the United States toward this young Asian democracy remains entangled by a history of diplomatic evasiveness—as well as, lately, by a seriously misguided effort to accommodate mainland China.

AARON L. FRIEDBERG *is a professor of politics and director of the research program in international security at Princeton. His latest book,* In the Shadow of the Garrison State, *has just been published by Princeton University Press.*

THE FOUNDATIONS of current U.S. policy were laid in two very different documents: the so-called Shanghai communiqué of 1972 and the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 (TRA). These pieces of paper represent the yin and yang of American diplomacy, the first being a classic illustration of the geopolitician's art, hammered out in secret by high-level negotiators, the second a public declaration of congressional sentiment, motivated more by ideology and outrage than by a coldblooded calculation of national interest.

In the early 1970's, the United States and the Communist People's Republic of China (PRC) were eager to move toward improved relations. Each side wished to enlist the other for its own purposes, and both wanted to counterbalance the growing power of the Soviet Union. The primary obstacle preventing their rapprochement was the remarkable fact that, after more than 20 years of Communist-party rule in Beijing, the United States was still refusing to recognize the regime there. Instead, we remained officially committed to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist or Kuomintang (KMT) government on the island of Taiwan as the legitimate ruler of all China.

There is a history here. Briefly, Taiwan was claimed by China only in the late 17th century. It was then lost to imperial Japan in 1895, and was not returned to Chinese control until the end of World War II. In 1949, following their defeat at the hands of Chinese Communist forces, large

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numbers of KMT troops fled to Taiwan from the mainland and established the Republic of China. The United States soon began to supply the regime with arms, and in 1954 the two nations entered into a mutual defense pact.

Needless to say, this tie posed something of an embarrassment to Richard Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger as they approached their opposite numbers in Beijing. What Chairman Mao Zedong and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai wanted in exchange for a more regular relationship was for the Americans to cut all ties to Taiwan and effectively to hand it back to the mainland. But Nixon and Kissinger, however eager they may have been to seal their grand strategic bargain, were well aware that the Taiwanese, who still had strong and influential friends in Washington, could not be so easily or obviously cast adrift. After lengthy negotiations, the two sides reached their fateful understanding: awkwardly embracing the official positions of both Taipei *and* Beijing, the United States acknowledged that "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China."

While Nixon and Kissinger did not promise immediately to abrogate the U.S.-Taiwan defense pact, they did pledge eventually to withdraw "all U.S. forces and military installations" from the island. At the same time, over strenuous Chinese objections, the American side reaffirmed "its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question." Without taking a public stand on the outlines of such a settlement, Nixon and Kissinger privately reassured their hosts that the U.S. would not support Taiwanese independence.

It was left to the Carter administration to pay the final price for full diplomatic "normalization." At the end of 1978, Carter agreed to Beijing's terms: the United States would terminate its defense treaty with Taiwan, withdraw any remaining military personnel, and sever all formal diplomatic ties, "derecognizing" the Taiwan-based Republic of China and accepting the People's Republic in its place as "the sole legal government of China."

But now Congress stepped in, troubled by this shabby treatment of an ally and angry at not having been consulted by the executive branch. To stiffen the residual U.S. commitment to the island, it passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) by veto-proof majorities in both houses; reluctantly, President Carter signed it into law. In the language of the TRA, which remains in force today, we pledge ourselves to regard "any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, [as] a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific," and, most significantly, we promise to "make available to Taiwan such quantity [of arms] as may be necessary to enable [it] to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability."

American policy is thus built on a contradiction: the United States does not acknowledge Taiwan's existence as an autonomous political entity, but it is committed by law to provide Taiwan with the arms it needs to defend its autonomy.

DESPITE ITS evident awkwardness, the structure put in place in the 1970's proved remarkably sturdy. The U.S.-PRC relationship flourished, and Taiwan was able to survive despite its diplomatic isolation. In the last decade, however, three interrelated developments combined to undermine the status quo. First, Taiwan became a genuinely democratic country. Next, and largely as a result, the mainland grew increasingly aggressive in its efforts to force Taiwan to submit to its rule. Lastly, the American response to this mounting Chinese pressure became wavering and dangerously weak. Let us take these matters one by one.

Cold-war rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, Taiwan under the nationalist rule of Chiang Kai-shek was no bastion of democracy. The KMT ruled with an iron fist, crushing all domestic dissent and occasionally murdering its opponents. But in the mid-1980's this began to change when Chiang's son and successor, President Chiang Ching-kuo, initiated a series of political reforms. Martial law was lifted, opposition parties legalized, political prisoners released, and restraints on public debate relaxed. The process of reform culminated ten years later in a freely contested presidential election. In 1996, KMT chief Lee Teng-hui became the first popularly elected Chinese leader in history.

Today, although Taiwanese democracy is not perfect—corruption in particular remains a big problem—the island has made remarkable progress. In Freedom House's annual survey ranking the world's nations on a scale from one to seven, it now earns twos for political rights and civil liberties respectively. (France earns a one and a two, the U.S. earns two ones.)

One consequence of this democratization has been the increasingly free discussion among the Taiwanese of what exactly the island's future should be. During the period of one-party rule, it was an act of treason to suggest that the Taipei government might abandon its claim to all of China. Today, the full range of possibilities can be freely debated, up to and including eventual, formal independence.

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Indeed, liberalization has enhanced domestic support for movement in this direction. For years, the ruling KMT party had been dominated by a minority born on the mainland, while the native Taiwanese majority, most of whom could trace their ancestral roots on the island several hundred years back, were denied a political voice. Now that they have a say, many turn out to evince little interest in, or enthusiasm for, reunification; their Taiwanese identity is more important to them than any sense of ethnic fellow-feeling with Chinese on the mainland. The relaxation of travel restrictions—another fruit of liberalization—has also played a role in this process by reinforcing perceptions of the PRC as a corrupt and brutally repressive place.

Taiwan's democratic transformation has also begun to alter public attitudes in the United States. The KMT's authoritarian regime enjoyed little grassroots support in this country. But since the early 1990's, polls have registered a slow rise in the numbers of Americans who regard Taiwan with "warmth"; it now ranks slightly above South Korea in this regard and slightly below Japan, Israel, and France. How the American people would react to a future confrontation between Taiwan and the mainland cannot be predicted in advance—much would depend on how such a conflict was portrayed by our political leaders—but if what Americans see when their attention is drawn to the western Pacific is a small, doughty democracy confronting a big, aggressive Communist power, there can be little question where their sympathies would lie.

AS FOR the PRC, it would be the grossest understatement to say that recent developments on Taiwan have caused it anxiety. Chinese nervousness is in large part a reaction to the sense that Taiwan may be wriggling out of its isolation, abandoning the "one China" formula and perhaps preparing to declare itself an independent, sovereign state. But of course the PRC is also responding to what Taiwan has *become*: its very visible success in achieving both economic prosperity and political reform is a threat to continued one-party Communist rule on the mainland.

The current crop of Chinese leaders is, moreover, less prestigious, less secure, and consequently more belligerent than those who came before. Jiang Zemin and his cohort preside over a country in which respect for the prevailing ideology has dwindled and in which the Communist party's authority seems to depend increasingly on the ability to generate continued economic progress while also mobilizing nationalist sentiment. To "lose" Taiwan would thus be a devastating, perhaps even a fatal, blow to the PRC regime, one that Jiang and his colleagues are likely to go to considerable lengths to avoid. On the other hand, they may also be willing to gamble a great deal in hopes of achieving a decisive victory in the form of reunification, on China's terms.

For the time being, what has clearly made sense to Beijing is a policy of ratcheting up the pressure: threats and saber-rattling designed at once to frighten those on the island who might favor independence and to deter outside powers from intervening. An atmosphere of urgency and danger also helps to rally popular support at home—opposition to Taiwanese independence is genuine and strongly felt in China—and to smooth over internal differences. Finally, provided that it does not lurch out of control, a heightened confrontation over Taiwan is especially useful to the Chinese military, always in need of justifications for a bigger budget and for a plausible and challenging scenario for the use of force.

In trying to come up with ways to coerce Taiwan and counter the possibility of American intervention, Chinese military planners have been exploring new technologies and concepts of operation. China's recent interest in information warfare, its ongoing mass production of short-range conventional ballistic missiles, its efforts to enhance the survivability and striking power of its intercontinental-range nuclear forces, and its pursuit of weapons capable of neutralizing American aircraft carriers, submarines, stealth aircraft, and satellites—all are driven by a desire to find military solutions to the Taiwan problem.

It is the short-range missile portion of this overall Chinese military program that is the most fully developed. The PRC is generally believed to have some 200 missiles already pointed across the Taiwan Strait. This past fall, U.S. intelligence detected two new missile bases under construction, each capable of firing close to 100 additional weapons. The Defense Intelligence Agency reportedly expects the total arsenal aimed at Taiwan to grow to 650 by the year 2005. For the moment at least, the island has virtually no capacity to defend itself against a massive missile barrage.

THE COERCIVE potential of these arms has already been demonstrated. In 1995, during the run-up to Taiwan's first open presidential election, President Lee Teng-hui asked permission to enter the United States to attend a reunion of his graduate-school class at Cornell University. Despite the fact that he was to travel as a private citizen, with no claim to recognition as a head of state,

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the State Department feared his visit would offend Chinese sensibilities. But instead of simply denying him access, the Clinton White House wavered and then, under pressure from Congress, let him enter. To this display of confusion, Beijing reacted with furious denunciations, followed by a fusillade of missiles fired into Taiwan's coastal waters.

The same menacing gesture was repeated in the spring of 1996 as the island's voters were preparing to go to the polls, compelling Washington to send two carrier battle groups as a token of U.S. disapproval and a warning against even more forceful Chinese action. Lee went on to win a majority on election day, but, across the Pacific, China's missiles had found their mark. The crisis struck fear in the hearts of President Clinton and his top advisers, convincing them of the need to bolster U.S.-PRC relations at almost any cost. The dispatch of the carriers, it would emerge, marked the apogee of administration courage in dealing with China.

Ever since, the Clinton White House has done everything in its power to build a "strategic partnership" with Beijing. As part of this overall effort, it has bent over backward to reassure the PRC that it does not support, and will not sanction, Taiwan independence. Former government officials have suggested that Washington may not come to Taiwan's assistance in the event that the island declares independence or even prepares to hold a referendum on the subject.

Behind closed doors, the administration has joined Beijing in pressuring Taipei to negotiate. In public, President Clinton has gone farther than any of his predecessors in trying to conform to Beijing's formulas, most notoriously on a 1998 visit when he repeated certain longstanding PRC demands known as the "three no's": no independence for Taiwan, no arrangements short of independence that would grant it equal status with the PRC (no "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan"), and no de-facto recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty.

For the loquacious American President, these may have been just words, but to the Asians who heard them they carried considerable weight. In the past, U.S. officials had always refused publicly to express any opinion on the final outlines of a cross-strait agreement, saying only that it should be arrived at peacefully and by mutual consent. Now an American President was echoing China's leaders in explicitly ruling out a number of possibilities for Taiwan, and doing so in the traditional role of a supplicant to the Middle Kingdom.

This major blunder set in motion the cycle of escalating tensions over Taiwan in the period leading up to the March election. As the journalist James Mann reported, China "promptly called upon Taiwan to 'face reality'"—i.e., take into account the newly unsympathetic position of the U.S.—"and enter into talks for reunification with China." To this the Taiwanese responded with a well-calibrated show of defiance—in July 1999, Lee Teng-hui suggested that discussions across the Taiwan Strait should henceforth be conducted on a "special state-to-state" basis. This demand for respect elicited from Beijing a verbal ferocity unusual even by Chinese standards. Returning to the rhetoric of the Mao era, China's leaders now began to speak once again of "liberating" the island and to warn, in the words of Vice Premier Qian Qichen, that "Taiwan independence can only mean war." Weeks before the election, Beijing added a new threat: a refusal on Taiwan's part to come to terms, and soon, might in itself be justification for an attack. Thus did American efforts to appease and reassure China end up by increasing the risk of war.

IN THE aftermath of the elections, which if anything have exacerbated the underlying contradictions in U.S. policy, we appear to face three options for dealing with the Taiwan question.

The first and in certain respects the most appealing option is somehow to restore the status quo. "A showdown over Taiwan is in no one's interest," reasoned the *New York Times* as the PRC stepped up its military pressure in the weeks before the March 18 election. Gently suggesting to the Chinese that they find a more "productive" approach to advancing their goal of reunification, the *Times* then chided Taiwan to avoid "provocative suggestions that its leaders were preparing for independence," and to forgo appeals to the U.S. for sophisticated new defensive weapons. The parties, concluded the *Times*, should be coaxed back into negotiations that might "someday" make it "possible to work out a political arrangement that both mainlanders and Taiwanese find acceptable."

The second option is one that few analysts advocate in polite company, but that is likely to gain support if tensions continue to mount, as they almost certainly will. It is to cut Taiwan loose. One way or another, the reasoning here goes, mainland China, a country in which we already have huge economic and strategic stakes, will emerge as the preponderant Asian power. As for Taiwan, it is largely an irritant to the U.S.-PRC relationship, its democracy a nuisance at best and at worst a real danger. The United States must therefore do what it can to get Taiwan's leaders to stifle talk of independence, accept the inevitability of unification,

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and make the best deal they can with the mainland while the balance of forces is still more or less in their favor. If, however, the Taiwanese insist on behaving irresponsibly, the United States should stand aside and wash its hands. Regrettable as a coerced reunification with the mainland might be, it would clear the way for better and more stable long-term relations between the U.S. and the PRC—an outcome certainly preferable to war.

Then there is the third option, equal and opposite to the second, which is to recognize Taiwan as an independent state. Proponents of this course of action point to the questionable legitimacy of Beijing's claims to the island. Taiwan has never been under the control of the Communist regime, nor is it an ancient part of mainland Chinese civilization; it is, rather, a fairly recent acquisition and, ironically, a product of China's own past history of imperial expansion.

But, in this scenario, the main virtue of a Taiwanese declaration of independence, aside from the benefit it would bring to the Taiwanese people, is the blow it would deal to the Beijing regime. If the Chinese Communist party let Taiwan go without a fight, it might never recover from the loss of face. If it fought, and lost, it might anyway end up being driven from power, much as Argentina's military dictators were when they foolishly tried to take the Falkland Islands from Great Britain. As for its prospects of *winning* such a fight, most analysts believe the PRC now lacks the capacity to invade Taiwan outright (as opposed to attacking it from the air with missiles and aircraft). Since they also expect China's military power to grow with time, it makes sense to go for independence sooner rather than later.

EACH OF these three options presents real problems. The trouble with the first is that while the Taiwanese might be willing to enter into open-ended negotiations, the Chinese have now made it clear that they are not. With their recent demands for a quick settlement, Jiang Zemin and his colleagues appear to have painted themselves into a corner; if they cannot "deliver" Taiwan soon, they will find themselves under attack from those who favor an even tougher stance.

In any case, what the "why-can't-we-all-just-get-along?" school of analysis ignores is that, in the real world, threats and belligerence serve a useful function. Not only does the PRC's current leadership stand to gain at home by periodically inflaming the Taiwan issue, but to the extent that aggressive tactics succeed in intimidating the Taiwanese and the Americans, they also serve China's long-term international strategy. Accommodating gestures of the kind urged by the *New York Times* are therefore unlikely to be reciprocated: China wants and needs to keep the pot boiling.

Besides, shoring up the diplomatic status quo will not freeze the current balance of military capabilities. Especially if the United States refrains from selling sophisticated arms to Taiwan, that balance would shift quickly in the mainland's favor. Deferring the Taiwan question may therefore simply increase the odds that a militarily stronger PRC will one day try to resolve it, once and for all, through the use of overwhelming force.

As for cutting Taiwan loose (the second option), it is subject to criticism on both moral and strategic grounds. Despite the nervous handwringing of American China-watchers, there is no reason to believe that the Taiwanese people are reckless and irresponsible. To the contrary, the Taiwanese have made clear through their electoral choices that, while they are averse to reunification with an authoritarian China, and strongly resolved to resist the PRC's efforts to bully them, they do not favor a dangerous rush toward independence.

This is a measured, reasonable posture, worthy of our support. Whatever considerations led to America's initial separation from the island in the 1970's, to consign it now to the tender mercies of the mainland would be a disgrace. Taiwan has, after all, remade itself into precisely the kind of society that Americans say they favor and wish to promote around the world. To abandon a fellow democracy in hopes of commercial or geopolitical gain, or even out of a well-intentioned wish to preserve the peace, would starkly violate American principles.

Strategically, our China experts reassure us that how the PRC behaves on the Taiwan issue has no implications for its actions elsewhere, and that once it achieves its goal of reunification it will have no further wish to expand its zone of control. But if the PRC does succeed in forcing Taiwan back into the fold, the inevitable conclusion will be that violence and threats of violence work, and that when push comes to shove the Americans back down. Others in Asia (and not only in Asia) will no doubt reach similar judgments, and recalibrate their diplomatic and defense policies accordingly. To expect a Chinese victory over Taiwan to reduce the PRC's appetite for regional dominance, or to leave America's Asian alliances unscathed, is to indulge in wishful thinking of the most dangerous kind.

But this also suggests why a declaration of independence—the third option—is inadvisable. True, a successful Taiwanese break might bring down the Beijing regime. But it might also wind up giving it a new lease on life, plus a new focus for the pent-up

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energies and frustrations of its subjects. Nor can the full extent of Beijing's military response to such a move be anticipated with any assurance. The notion, entertained by some, that feelings of ethnic solidarity would restrain Beijing from doing things (including using nuclear weapons) that could kill large numbers of Taiwanese civilians overlooks the bloody history of the Chinese civil war. The Taiwanese people may ultimately decide that they are willing to take such a chance, but it would be wrong for the United States to encourage them in this direction, at least until we were certain of our own willingness to do whatever might be necessary to back them up.

THE WEAKNESSES of these three options suggest the need for an alternative that can undo some of the damage done by the current administration. The primary objective of our policy must be to repair the frayed fabric of deterrence—deterrence, that is, of mainland China. Under the terms of such a policy, the United States would make it clear not only that it strongly favors a mutually acceptable resolution to the Taiwan issue, if and when one can be found, but that it will *not* accept, under any circumstances, an outcome imposed by force.

A proper China policy must be one of both words and deeds. In articulating it, we would remind the Chinese that the United States has a history of getting involved in conflicts even when it has wished to avoid them. At the beginning of 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson strongly implied that the Korean peninsula lay outside the perimeter of American interests; six months later, when North Korea attacked the South, the United States came quickly to the latter's defense. In the event of a PRC strike on Taiwan, what happened in Korea could happen again, shattering relations for a generation. In its aftermath, the United States would assuredly deny China access to markets, capital, and technology, and press its friends and allies to follow suit. China's hopes for continued economic progress would be dashed, increasing the likelihood of domestic political instability.

Other costs should be pointed out as well. Although most Asian governments claim to accept the notion that the Taiwan issue is a purely internal Chinese matter, a bloody cross-strait conflict would send a shiver of dread throughout the region. PRC willingness to use massive force to achieve its ambitions would encourage the proliferation of missiles, missile defenses, and weapons of mass destruction, virtually all of which would be directed toward China itself. And it would drive other countries, including some that are presently non-aligned, into defensive coalitions with one another and with the United States. China's leaders sometimes complain that they are being encircled by a ring of hostile powers; they should—quietly—be made to understand that, if they attack Taiwan, they *will* be encircled, and they will have only themselves to blame.

Of course, to be effective, all such words about future consequences need to be accompanied by present actions—actions, that is, in aid of Taiwan. The island's most pressing (though by no means its only) requirement is a credible defense against the threat of mass conventional missile attacks. It has already bought from us Patriot missiles similar to those we used, with very limited success, during the Gulf war. But with China's rocket forces already large and growing fast, Taiwan needs additional capabilities quickly.

Objections to stepped-up U.S. assistance are legion. Some observers worry openly that we will "start an arms race," as if an arms race were not already under way, and as if Taiwan were not in danger of losing it. Or it is said (for instance by David Shambaugh in the *Times*) that Taiwan cannot even absorb the weapons we have sold to it, let alone still newer ones, since the island's military "lacks spare parts and its forces are often inadequately trained." But this, too, by any rational calculus, is an argument for more and different kinds of assistance, not less.

Underlying these objections is a deeper fear. Just as in the darkest days of the cold war with the Soviet Union, some are so impressed with China's enormous size and its grim determination to have its way that they are led to paint it as an irresistible force. In the face of Chinese power, they argue, not opposition but accommodation is the best and certainly the safest course. After all, little Taiwan, as one former Clinton administration official has put it, "cannot, in the long run, hope to win [an arms race] against a vastly larger and equally dynamic society."

That mainland China is "vastly larger" than Taiwan is undeniable. That its society will prove to be "equally dynamic" one can only hope, for the sake of its own people's future. But its political system is something else again. Only defeatists need assume that this system is destined to endure forever—and yet that is precisely the assumption on which proposals for preemptive appeasement are based. Rather, the best hope for real peace lies in the eventual transformation of the PRC along lines already laid down by its island neighbor.

By continuing to survive and to thrive, Taiwan may speed the day when change comes to the mainland. But it is only with our help that a democratic Taiwan can outlast the corrupt and moribund regime that now threatens daily to destroy it.

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Learning from Isaiah

Norman Podhoretz

Isaiah is generally regarded as the greatest of all the prophetic books of the Bible; as such, it ought to have something to say to us today. I think it most certainly does. But—for several reasons—it is no simple task to determine what that something is.

To begin with, Isaiah is a very hard book to understand. As I can testify from having recently struggled with it in the original, many years after doing so as a student, the Hebrew in which it is written is perhaps exceeded in difficulty only by the language of the book of Job, while in substance the text is often obscure to the point of impenetrability. In this connection there is a story, possibly apocryphal, about a complaint Martin Luther made while at work on his translation of the Bible into German. The prophet Isaiah, he is supposed to have exclaimed with exasperation, seemed to pour forth anything that came into his mind, in any order, so that trying to figure out what he was talking about had driven Luther half-crazy. It was only thanks to the grace of God that all was made plain.

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This was long before modern critical scholarship came along with *its* interpretative tools—drawn from philology, archaeology, and other disciplines. Yet even since the grace of these particular tools was vouchsafed to commentators, disagreements have remained as to the meaning of this or that passage, the fixing of chronology, and—most important of all—the authorship of the book.

And there is yet another factor that deepens the problem of discovering what the book of Isaiah has to say to us today. This consists of the selective readings and outright misrepresentations to which the text has been subjected by three different groups to whom Isaiah is a special favorite: Reform Jews, political liberals, and Christians. So influential have the misinterpretations spread by these three groups proved to be that, without getting them out of the way, it is impossible to grasp what the book was saying to its contemporaries, let alone what it may be saying to us.

Before we can grapple responsibly with that problem, however, we need to go over some historical background and to familiarize ourselves with the central scholarly debates over the book. Not all these debates have been resolved, and they may never be until the end of days. But on the question of authorship, at least, there has emerged a limited consensus. It is that the book of Isaiah was written by at least two different prophets.

Everyone except strict fundamentalists now

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agrees that chapters one through 36 are by the "first Isaiah," Isaiah the son of Amotz, who lived in Jerusalem in the 8th century B.C.E. and whose career spanned approximately the last 40 years of that century. This was after the northern kingdom of Israel—which eventually became the Ten Lost Tribes—had split off from the southern kingdom of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem, where Solomon's Temple still stood.

Everyone also agrees that chapters 37 through 39 are *about* the first Isaiah but not written by him. In fact, they are mainly lifted from the second book of Kings to provide a kind of narrative conclusion to the first Isaiah's collection of prophecies.

Finally, everyone agrees that chapters 40 through 55 are by the second or so-called Deutero-Isaiah. This prophet's actual name is unknown, but (as *almost* everyone also agrees) he lived in exile in Babylonia 200 years after the first Isaiah—that is, in the 6th century B.C.E. With him, consequently, we are in a very different world from that of the first Isaiah. The second Isaiah's world is one in which the Jews of Judah have been cast out of their land, in which the Temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed, and in which they—or at any rate some segment of them—pine for a chance to go back home again.

This longing is what Deutero-Isaiah promises will be fulfilled. He is the great prophet of consolation. In this he differs from the first Isaiah, who mainly though by no means entirely concentrates on harsh and even horrifying denunciations both of his own people and their enemies. But Deutero-Isaiah begins with what understandably became for Jews one of the most beloved chapters in the whole of prophetic literature. Indeed, it is chanted every year in the synagogue on the first Sabbath following the fast of Tisha b'Av, which commemorates the destruction of the Temple. Here in English are the words with which the second Isaiah in effect introduces himself to the exiles in Babylonia:*

> Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

This note of consolation is carried forward in visions of an exodus from Babylonia that will be even more marked by miracles than the one from Egypt in ancient times. There are also visions of a restored Jerusalem that will be more splendid than ever and to which all kings and principalities shall flow, bearing treasure and tribute and seeking the word of the God of Israel, Whom they will acknowledge as the God of all.

Alas, only a fragment of this dream was realized. But in the tradition of his predecessor, Isaiah the son of Amotz, Deutero-Isaiah blamed this not on God or on his own failure of foresight. He blamed it on the relapse into the sin of idolatry among the exilic community in Babylonia. At this point, the great prophet of consolation became no less capable than the first Isaiah of ferocious denunciations that can still make one's blood run cold in the reading.

Or was it really Deutero-Isaiah who issued these denunciations? Here again serious disagreement enters among the scholars. Since many of the denunciations occur in the last eleven chapters of the book, 56 through 66, some ascribe them to a third or Trito-Isaiah. *This* Isaiah, a number of scholars speculate, was among the Judean exiles who were allowed to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C.E. by Cyrus, the Persian king who had by then vanquished the old Babylonian empire. Cyrus also gave the returning exiles permission to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem that (in defiance, by the way, of the prophecies of the first Isaiah) had been destroyed 50 years earlier. But when Cyrus authorized the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple, and even so the Golden Age did not arrive, Trito-Isaiah, presumably a disciple of Deutero-Isaiah, became bitter: hence the denunciations.

Still other scholars, however (and I am inclined to agree with them), see no good reason to posit a third Isaiah, and assign the last eleven chapters (with the exception of a few passages here and there) to the disappointments of the second.

Yet to darken counsel even further, most scholars take the view that different hands are at work not only in the last eleven chapters but also in various passages throughout the entire book of Isaiah that were interpolated by later editors. One scholar has even described the book as an anthology comprising the oracles of at least six different prophets and/or their disciples.

IF, THEN, we venture to discover what Isaiah has to say to us today, which Isaiah are we talking about?

Fortunately, assistance is to be found in several continuities of theme that unite the two or more

* After much pondering, I have decided in quoting to use the 17th-century King James Version. Even though it contains many errors, it is by far the most beautiful translation ever made of the Bible, and to my ear it almost miraculously succeeds in capturing the rhythms and locutions of the Hebrew.

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Isaiahs, which may well be why they wound up being joined together into a single book. The author, or authors, of the last 26 chapters clearly show familiarity with the author of the first 36. I would even go so far as to claim that both the basic doctrine and the oracular vision the first Isaiah set forth in Jerusalem in the 8th century were being applied by the second and the third (if there was a third) to the radically different historical circumstances that followed the Babylonian exile more than two centuries later. Thanks to this, it becomes possible to look upon Isaiah as a single work, which is precisely what millions upon millions of people have done throughout the ages. And this brings me back to the three groups for whom it is a special favorite.

Let me begin with the Reform movement in Judaism, which was born in Germany in the 19th century and then established itself as, for a time, the most popular Jewish denomination in the United States. Almost from the outset, Reform saw itself as rooted more directly in the prophets, and especially in Isaiah, than in the rabbis of the Talmud (who of course came much later, and out of whom there eventually emerged the traditionalist Judaism against which the 19th-century Reformers were rebelling). In line with the liberal Protestant theologians and biblical scholars of their day, the original Reformers also looked upon the prophetic books—and especially the first Isaiah—as marking an evolutionary advance over the more primitive stage of Judaism reflected in earlier books of the Bible.

In that earlier stage, they held, all the emphasis had been placed on ritual, and in particular on the barbaric and superstitious practice of animal sacrifice as the way to worship God. But then along came a great visionary whose very first oracle contains the following words (once more in the King James Version):

> To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

And again: "Bring Me no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me." God then goes on to demand through Isaiah that the mistreatment of widows and orphans come to an end, that the grinding of the faces of the poor cease, that there be no more accumulation of wealth by the rich at the expense of the poor.

In short, in light of this interpretation, we have here a new definition of sin as social oppression rather than neglect of the ritual commandments, and a new definition of the Law as social justice. This idea, expressed in chapter one of the book of Isaiah in relation to sacrifices in the Temple, then reappears in chapter 58—that is, in Deutero-Isaiah (or Trito-, if there was such a one)—in relation to the new institution of the synagogue first developed in Babylonia as a substitute for the Temple service. In Babylonia, the people complain to God: "Wherefore have we fasted . . . and Thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takest no knowledge?" But Deutero- (or Trito-) Isaiah answers in the name of God that fasting is not what He demands of them. What God demands is lovingkindness and compassion—the giving of shelter and bread and clothing to the poor. Only by doing these things will they achieve redemption.

SO FAR, so good for the Reformers' interpretation. Yet the focus on this aspect of the prophetic message ignores two crucial elements. For a start, it overlooks the second half of chapter 58. There we come upon an equally eloquent denunciation of the people for violating the Sabbath—a sin that also stands in the way of their redemption. And in what does their redemption consist in the prophetic vision of Deutero- (or Trito-) Isaiah? Why, it consists of a return from exile to Jerusalem where the Temple will be rebuilt and the prescribed sacrifices can be resumed: the very sacrifices that, according to the first Isaiah, had become an abomination unto the Lord.

True, chapter one in the first Isaiah contains no balancing passage comparable to the one about the Sabbath in Deutero-Isaiah's chapter 58. Yet we know from other verses in other chapters of the first Isaiah that he regarded the Temple with veneration. We also know that he placed high hopes upon the accession to the throne of King Hezekiah. Though Hezekiah later disappointed him politically, to the first Isaiah (and also as the second book of Kings saw it) the great *religious* merit of this king was to centralize all worship in the Temple in Jerusalem and to abolish all other altars or locales in which sacrifices were offered.

Indeed, the sublime vision of universal peace for which the first Isaiah is most prized and that has helped to earn him a reputation as the greatest of the Hebrew prophets depends for its realization precisely upon the coming of all the nations of the world to the Temple in Jerusalem where they will acknowledge the God of Israel as God:

> And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be estab-

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> lished in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come yet, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Given this glorification of the Temple in Jerusalem, which existed for the purpose of offering sacrifices, the message of the book of Isaiah is distorted and misrepresented if we take it as a license to reject the ritual aspects of Judaism and concern ourselves only with the moral ones.

I am not denying—how could any reader?—that the Isaiahs attack the notion that the obligations of a Jew begin and end with observance of the ritual commandments. In that sense it is not entirely wrong to argue that the two or three Isaiahs, like such other prophets as Amos and Micah, put more stress on the ethical than on the ritual dimensions of religion. Nevertheless, they also repudiate the notion that Judaism can be entirely summed up by morality alone. When the first Isaiah expresses disgust with sacrifices, he is not proposing that they be abolished: he is declaring that they are of no account unless they are accompanied by actions in the moral sphere. And the same point can be made about the attack by the second (or third) Isaiah on fasting and prayer.

Even more telling evidence can be found in an astonishing passage in chapter 43 of the second Isaiah. Here we have God rebuking the Jews of Babylon for *not* offering sacrifices to Him. So unfair is this rebuke—He Himself had forbidden them to do so outside the Holy Land—that commentators have danced many a fancy exegetical step around it. But the fact remains: the second Isaiah attributes so great a value to the offering of sacrifices that he has God chastising the Jews for failing to perform them even in a situation where doing so would itself have been a sin.

What is more, the third Isaiah (or the second, as the case may be), addressing those among the Babylonians who have converted to Judaism in Babylonia, and the Jews who have forcibly been made into court eunuchs there, promises that they, too, will be permitted to join the rest of the community in its return from exile to Jerusalem—*provided*, that is, that they have kept the Sabbath and not polluted it. And what will they do when they get to Jerusalem? "Even them," God declares through the prophet, "will I bring to My holy mountain, . . . their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar."

These days, we sometimes hear from the newspapers about certain Orthodox Jews who deal dishonestly in business, or are cruel to their families, and yet who evidently imagine that so long as they are punctilious in their observance of the ritual commandments, they are fulfilling their obligations as Jews and have nothing to fear from the wrath of God. If we wish to translate the message of the book of Isaiah into contemporary terms, we can without distortion or misrepresentation read it as chastising such Jews. But we cannot read the prophecies of the Isaiahs—at least not without violence to their words—as a justification for dismissing ritual as archaic or primitive or unworthy of an enlightened modern Jew.*

IN SHORT, neither the first Isaiah nor the second—nor the third, if he existed—was supplying a warrant for the foundational theology of the Reform movement. But neither were they telling us that all it takes to be a good Jew, or for that matter a good person, is to be a good liberal in the current definition of that term.

It was because this belief became so common among Jews that the American Jewish community was once unkindly—if not altogether inaccurately—described as "the Democratic party at prayer." Yet many of the same arguments I have just advanced in rejecting the Reform movement's interpretation of Isaiah apply here with even greater force. For those who imagine that this book is a kind of fund-raising letter for the Democratic party dictated by God to the prophet are even more mistaken than the Reformers of past generations who sought a grounding in it for their religious philosophy (unless, that is, the funds being solicited are in the form of bullocks and rams and he-goats intended for burnt offerings).

Yes, the Isaiahs do make a great point of some of the ideals that today are the staples of liberal rhetoric. In the real world, however, these ideals are more often than not undermined by the actions such rhetoric engenders, as when certain efforts

* I should note that the Reform movement has itself been moving away from this view and has begun to encourage a greater degree of ritual practice than the more radical founders and shapers of the movement probably would have liked.

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designed to help the poor are redoubled even when they demonstrably result in worsening the plight of their intended beneficiaries. Yet even if such efforts were more successful in practice, they would constitute only a necessary and not a sufficient condition of the Isaianic requirement for redemption. I am not suggesting that every time the welfare system is reformed, a he-goat be sacrificed, or even a prayer offered (though the prayer—intoned, naturally, in silence and in secret, out of deference to the liberal construal of the "emanations and penumbras" of the establishment clause of the First Amendment—might not be such a bad idea). Nor am I ascribing a position to the Isaiahs on the specifics of contemporary social policy. But surely they were asking for something more spiritually exalted than ideological posturing or partisan political maneuvers as the driving force of their calls for compassion and lovingkindness.

BUT IF this book is not a religious charter for the Reform movement of the 19th century, and if it is not a liberal political manifesto, neither is it—and now I arrive at the third and most influential group for whom Isaiah is the greatest of all the prophets—a herald of Christianity.

Far be it from me to enter into a dispute with anyone who believes that Jesus was the messiah, that he was the son of God born to a virgin, and that in being crucified he took upon himself, and atoned for, the sins of all mankind—or at least that portion of mankind which accepted all this as true. Though as a Jew I am by definition not among that portion, I have no desire to challenge its faith. What I do feel it necessary to challenge is the view held by pious Christians throughout the past two centuries that the book of Isaiah foretells—and in striking detail—the coming of that faith.

Like the rabbis of the Talmud and strictly Orthodox Jews today, such Christians have always looked upon the book of Isaiah as a unified whole. Careful students of the text could hardly fail to recognize that, beginning with chapter 40, there are references to historical events that occurred some 200 years after the ones mentioned before. But this poses no problem to Orthodox or fundamentalist believers: they simply explain it by Isaiah's power to foresee the future: after all, that is what prophets do. Therefore, the Christological interpretation draws freely and—from a critical-scholarly point of view—indiscriminately from all 66 chapters.

Anyone who has ever read the book of Isaiah itself, or who has read and forgotten it but has listened carefully to Handel's *Messiah*, will recognize what I am referring to here. For much of the libretto of the *Messiah* is taken from widely scattered parts of Isaiah, and these verses are then juxtaposed with passages from the New Testament that presumably testify to the fulfillment of Isaiah's promises. In this, Handel and his unknown librettist were simply following the traditional Christological interpretation of Isaiah, according to which the book was a major "prooftext" demonstrating that Christianity is not merely the offspring of Judaism but in effect its legitimate heir, with the Christian scheme of things actually being foreshadowed in what to Christians is the Old Testament and to Jews is simply the Bible.

There are many well-known examples. The first is in verse fourteen of chapter seven. As the King James translators render it: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"—a name which Handel correctly glosses as "God with us." Certainly this would seem to foretell the miraculous manner in which Christians—not all, but many—believe that Jesus was born. But the trouble is that *almah*, the word Christians translate as "virgin," does not mean virgin; it means young woman. The Hebrew word for virgin is *betulah*, which, as it happens, is used several times in the book of Isaiah. If the prophet had wanted to say virgin, surely he would have used it here as well.

In any event, Jewish commentators, and the great majority of contemporary scholars of the Bible, whether Jewish or not, think that the son to whom Isaiah is referring here is neither the messiah nor Jesus but the Judean king I mentioned above—King Hezekiah. It is also of King Hezekiah that Isaiah is speaking when, in chapter nine—another central Christian prooftext that also appears in Handel's *Messiah*—he says: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder."

But what has perhaps been even more central to the Christological reading is the figure of the servant of the Lord who appears in various guises not in the first but in the second Isaiah. These four passages (or songs, as the scholars describe them) are among the more obscure in a very obscure book, and therefore lend themselves to imaginative exegeses. But to Jews—and, again, to most modern scholars, both Christian and Jewish—the servant sometimes represents the Jewish people as a whole, sometimes the remnant of it that has remained loyal to God in exile and refused to assimilate to Babylonian paganism, sometimes the prophet speaking either in his own name or in theirs.

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Obviously, in the Christological interpretation, the servant is Jesus, and those who accept that interpretation rest heavily on chapter 53. Here it is that the crucial element of the Christological interpretation appears, namely, the idea that the servant suffers for the sins of others: "Surely he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

The most powerful case against the Christological interpretation of this strange verse, and a few others like it, has been made by the late Israeli Bible scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann. With an overwhelming wealth of evidence and argument, Kaufmann demonstrates that the servant in this particular context represents those Jews who remained faithful in exile but were unjustly subjected to the same punishing fate as their fellow Jews who were drawn into the sin of idolatry while living in Babylonia. Now God is about to permit these sinners to return home to Jerusalem, thanks to the merit of those who suffered the same pains of exile without falling into sin.

Be all this as it may, I would also propose that there is nothing remarkable about the fact that the authors of the New Testament—all or most of whom, like Jesus himself, were Jews—should have depended so heavily upon the book of Isaiah. For what they needed to explain, to themselves and to others, was how it happened that Jesus could have been killed before he was able to perform his appointed messianic task of liberating Palestine from the Romans and ushering in a new era when all the world would recognize that the God of Israel was the one true God. Isaiah hinted at a way of understanding so wholly unexpected an outcome; he could even be cited as having prophesied it, or something resembling it.

IF, THOUGH, the book of Isaiah is not saying what many Reform theologians, political liberals, and Christians imagine, what *is* it saying that is applicable to our circumstances today?

For a start, it is saying that the covenant into which God entered with the Jewish people at Sinai is eternal. "How odd of God to choose the Jews," an anti-Semitic wag once quipped. I agree with him. There definitely *is* something odd about God's decision to appoint a scraggly tribe of nomadic ex-slaves wandering around the desert as the agents through which His truth would be made known to the whole world. But, odd or not, the book of Isaiah affirms and reaffirms that this is precisely what God did.

It also affirms and reaffirms that when the Jews suffer at the hands of other nations, it is because they are being punished for having turned their backs upon the obligations they undertook under that covenant.* Yet the nations at whose hands they suffer—Assyria and Babylonia in the times of the Isaiahs—are acting, though they know it not, as God's instrument: the rods of His wrath, as the first Isaiah puts it. And when these nations have executed God's judgment upon His sinful people—through conquest, killing, and deportation—*their* turn will come to be punished, especially because they are so puffed up with pride that they think they themselves are responsible for their military victories ("Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?").

But they will be punished with a difference. No matter how severe the devastation wrought upon the Jewish people, a remnant will always remain. By contrast, the heathen nations and their empires will disappear entirely from the stage of history.

I recently wrote that the doctrine of the Chosen People was regarded as a "scandal"—the "scandal of particularity"—by some Christian theologians. I agree with them, too. For just as there is something odd, something offensive to reason, about the idea that the one true God, the creator of the universe, the God of all, should have selected a single people to carry out His will in history, there is also something theologically outrageous in it.

Curiously, however, this idea, odd as it seems to reason and scandalous as it is to theology, does make sense as an empirical proposition. After all, what hypothesis better explains the amazing history of the Jews? The empires of both the ancient and the modern worlds that attempted to destroy the Jews by one means or another have themselves all been destroyed. Yet a Jewish remnant remains.

The first lesson the book of Isaiah has to teach us today, then, is that the Jews must not and will not ever disappear. Admittedly, the great visions of peace and harmony in Isaiah embrace not the Jewish people alone, but the whole world. These visions are, to adopt the usual jargon employed in such discussions, universalistic. But paradoxically, they can only be realized through the *particular* agency of the Jews, whose burden and privilege it is to spread the word revealed to them at Sinai. Despite the correlative cost in suffering inflicted upon them by God for their sins—a cost that has led Jews throughout the centuries to pray, "Dear God,

*Despite the logical implications of this conception, I would like to think that Isaiah would not have extended it to the Holocaust.

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please choose someone else for a change"—a Jewish remnant there will always be.

So we are assured by the book of Isaiah, and so I think we still have good reason to believe. We also have good reason to believe in the corollary of this assurance—namely, that those who set out to destroy the Jews will themselves be utterly destroyed. Let those Arabs who dream of a holy war, a *jihad*, against the state of Israel take heed.

WHICH LEADS directly to the second message the book of Isaiah has for us today. If I may be permitted an anachronism that is nevertheless fully consonant with this prophetic text, Isaiah is a *Zionist* book; and I mean Zionist in the full political sense of that term.

Consider: the first Isaiah counsels submission by the relatively weak kingdom of Judah to the seemingly unstoppable power of Assyria and warns against forming an alliance with Egypt against it; he fulminates against Jerusalem and Judah "because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord"; he fumes that "the faithful city" has become a "harlot." Yet this same Isaiah still insists that Jerusalem must remain under Jewish sovereignty. Only thus—*only* under Jewish sovereignty—will Israel become "a light unto the nations." *Only* under Jewish sovereignty will the Law go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

And then there is the second Isaiah. Though he has prophesied that the Persian king Cyrus, then ruling Babylonia, will allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, he does not feel vindicated when this prophesy is fulfilled. On the contrary, Deutero-Isaiah is sorely disappointed because Jerusalem and Judah have remained a part of the Persian empire and have not achieved the full independence that, to this Isaiah too, is the precondition of their becoming a light unto the nations.

On this matter, those who might take heed are the 300 American rabbis who recently advocated that sovereignty over Jerusalem be shared with the Palestinian Arabs. I would especially advise them to ponder verse twenty of chapter five: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

This marvelous verse carries me straight to the third of the three lessons that we—whether Jews or not—can learn from the book of Isaiah today as we enter the 21st century. I must confess that, unlike most people, I do not locate this third lesson in the great visions for which the book is most esteemed. These are the verses from the first Isaiah I have already quoted in which he envisages world peace and the end of all violence throughout nature, even among the wild beasts, and the equally famous passage from chapter eleven:

> The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den.

Deutero- or Trito-Isaiah delivers himself of a similar oracle in the next-to-last chapter of the whole book, chapter 65, which portrays the creation of "new heavens and a new earth," when there shall be no more weeping or crying, and when—in an echo of the first Isaiah—"the wolf and the lamb shall feed together."

In my heterodox and possibly even heretical opinion, these dreams of a world from which all violence is absent and peace reigns among men and beasts alike have proved to be more dangerous than uplifting. Those who have set out to realize such utopian aspirations have often felt justified in murdering as many millions as they thought it would take to bring the age of perfect peace and justice into being.

In addition, as we should have learned from the experience of the 1930's, the pursuit of peace can be the surest path to war. My great fear is that this lesson is being forgotten in relation to the state of Israel today—where, to quote from another of the major prophets, Jeremiah, many cry "peace, peace, when there is no peace."

BUT IT is not only in the political realm that good and evil, light and dark, bitter and sweet are being confused today. We see the same process at work throughout our culture. There it often appears in the guise of a relativistic philosophy that pretends to discern no basis at all for judging between good and evil, light and dark, bitter and sweet. The same philosophy denies that the moral realm is governed by law just as the physical world is; and it is in this denial that it comes most radically into conflict with the Bible as a whole, and the book of Isaiah in particular.

From the perspective of the "multiculturalism" that prevails in our educational system, for example, there are no criteria for judging any culture as superior to any other (except that ours is probably

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worse than all others). If certain peoples are induced by their own cultural imperatives to practice cannibalism or child sacrifice, who are we to say them nay?: "different strokes for different folks." Or, in the view of many feminists, the Bible is wrong in telling us that "male and female created He them": the only differences between men and women, they proclaim, are created not by God or nature but by society. Or, in the eyes of the deconstructionist school of thought that prevails in our universities, there is no objective reality at all, and therefore it makes no sense even to speak of the confusions lamented and decried by the first Isaiah.

So corrosive is the relativism that ties these disparate phenomena together, and so dangerous is it, that the warning found in the verse I have just quoted from the first Isaiah about confusing good and evil seems to me to have become far more urgent to heed than his vision of swords being beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Concerning that vision, moreover, I would say this: if one believes in God, one can assuredly accept that it is in His power to bring about such a miraculous transformation at the end of days. But, again if one believes in God, one must also accept that it is *only* in His power to perform these miracles, and not in the power of mere mortals like us.

In fact, the pride in self, reflected in the delusion that we humans possess the power to create a perfect world, is what the book of Isaiah, in *all* its parts, identifies as the source and fount of idolatry. In the Isaianic concept, making graven images and bowing down to them as gods is a form of self-deification through which man worships the work of his own hands, which is to say himself. By contrast, what *does* lie within our power, according to the book of Isaiah in all its parts, is the ability to perceive the difference between good and evil, to do the one and shun the other.

It was through the exercise of this power that the Jewish people in the times of the Isaiahs were supposed to resist and fight the paganism and the idolatry all around them. And it was through this power that they were enjoined to fulfill their divinely appointed mission as carriers of the monotheistic faith they had accepted at Sinai—the faith that there was only one God, that before Him there were no others, and most particularly not the works of our own hands, and that at the end of days all men would finally come to acknowledge Him. Who would have thought that the apparently obvious, and even banal, assertion that there is a difference between good and evil, and that we humans have the power to discern it, would emerge nearly 4,000 years after the birth of monotheism, and nearly 2,000 after its triumph over much of the paganism and the idolatry of the ancient world, as today perhaps the element most relevant to us—and again I speak both of Jews and non-Jews—in what so many people consider the greatest of the prophetic books of the Bible?

And yet to me it seems that this is indeed the case, because as we begin the journey through yet another millennium we find ourselves confronted with contemporary mutations of the paganism and the idolatry of the ancient world. Two such I have already alluded to. One is what the late social critic Christopher Lasch called "the culture of narcissism." Narcissism: the very word (from the Greek, of course, not the Hebrew) connotes worship of oneself. The second is revolutionary utopianism—or what the Talmud characterizes as the sin of "forcing the end" of history. But there are many others.

The war of monotheism against paganism and idolatry is the main unifying theme of the entire book of Isaiah. Reading it today, we—and yet again I speak of Jews and non-Jews alike—can hear ourselves called upon to go on fighting that same war, and in exactly the spirit in which we are commanded by a different book of the Bible, Deuteronomy, to love the Lord our God: with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our might.

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Stendhal on MacDougal Street

André Aciman

On the inside of the back cover of my small Liddell & Scott *Greek-English Lexicon*, published by Oxford University Press and with me since undergraduate days, is an address in Greenwich Village. It was written down in haste on May 27, 1969. Next to it is a telephone number. For weeks, intent on persuading myself that I was not so interested in the girl who had given it to me, I had refused to learn the number by heart. Nor had I yet called her often enough to commit it to memory, since the two of us were just barely starting what I failed to realize had already ended.

That things might have taken a wrong turn, even at this early stage, came home to me a few weeks later at Caffè Reggio on MacDougal Street. After I had waited about two hours on that hot June afternoon, it finally dawned on me that the awful condition I had vaguely heard someone call being stood up had, unless I was totally mistaken, very possibly befallen me as well, and that the only way to *prevent* it from happening was to leave instantly: that is, before it definitely occurred.

The girl never apologized or made excuses. She didn't call, nor did she return my calls. I never forgave her and, probably, I have made every woman pay for it since.

At the time, having left Caffè Reggio in a flustered state, I entertained the possibility that she might have shown up after all, and so—I told myself—the real reason I kept calling was to determine whether it wasn't she but I who had to apologize. To my college friends who assured me I was deceiving myself, I answered that I'd have agreed with them about any other girl but that in this case things were different. It did not occur to me that if there is one thing that makes all love stories identical, it is the conviction that each one is different.

But there was unfinished business at Caffè Reggio, and over that unbearably hot New York City summer I would return there again and again, sometimes more than once a day, the way criminals, and victims, too, return to the scene that made them who they are. I was seeking to recover something I felt I'd lost, trying to become such a familiar in the place as to immunize myself to the disquieting ache I felt each time I read "Caffè Reggio" written in her hand on the inside back cover of my *Greek-English Lexicon*. I wanted to make the place mine, wash it down the way you wash down poison, blot it out since I couldn't blot out the girl who had brought me there. I wanted to steal Caffè Reggio from her, to banish her from it, to give it back only if she begged. I wanted to push back time, undo the memory of that afternoon and of the next one when I returned hop-

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ing I'd gotten the date wrong and of all the following ones when I came back thinking to retrieve what I'd lost when I walked out in a fury, saying, "That's it, I've waited long enough!" In the end, I wanted Caffè Reggio to remind me not of her but of me, the way I hoped she'd think of me when, someday, she'd eventually return.

Being at Caffè Reggio that summer consisted of sitting, smoking, and reading in an air of studied indifference, an air designed not only to make me look attractive in case she happened to walk in but, by dint of daily rehearsal, to persuade myself that I had in fact grown indifferent. I had learned this mental trick in one of the novels I was reading that summer, Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. If you like someone, brace yourself, don't show it; think counterintuitively, keep zig-zagging, feel with a forked heart. If anything, show that you don't care, be distant. It will make her wonder, and in wondering she will warm to you, and in warming be snared.

The formula was supposed to work; it was the way of the world. Never mind that the one person in whose amorous career it totally failed, and with abysmal regularity, was the author of *The Red and the Black*.

SHE CALLED a year later. Did I want to go out that evening? Of course I did. By then I was certain that if she did ever call, it would only be because I was the last in a long list. We went to a movie. Then she had to run home.

Another year passed. Then another. One weekday evening, same thing: she calls. Would I like to go out? Of course I would. We ended up in the Village, on MacDougal Street, at what she said was her favorite café, forgetting she'd already told me all about it three years earlier. I was rather pleased with myself for resisting the impulse to say something either about the date-that-never-was or about this place that was so layered with my own passage that I almost felt she'd offered to come visit me at home. And so here we were, sitting in the back of Caffè Reggio, on my familiar little bench that seemed more like a pew. The place was crowded, everyone seemed happy this weekday spring evening, and right by the large antique cylindrical espresso machine she said, "Look at me," and started to kiss me. I wanted to tell her that this was what I'd always dreamed of, that I'd almost given up. But I didn't interrupt.

Later, as we were walking up MacDougal and then through Washington Square, I looked at her face and caught her smiling. Only then did it dawn on me that I too had been smiling. She leaned against a wall and said, "Kiss me again."

I thought she was testing herself, then I thought she was testing me, then I thought she was testing someone else she wanted to be with but wasn't. Or did she just want to be kissed by me? I took her home. Her mother was sleeping in the room next to the kitchen. After a while she said, hesitantly, that maybe I'd have to think of leaving. I did not press the point.

That night at home I sat at my desk sensing I had come full circle. I felt almost vindicated. From the boy who had been stood up on MacDougal Street I had become a man whose late-night advances had been uneasily staved off. I decided to jot down the times I'd seen her, from the first time, on a subway platform, when I didn't know her name, to the time my heart skipped a beat when I caught her standing right next to me at the library, to the moment this very evening when she walked me to the door of her apartment on Fort Washington Road. It never occurred to me that by her awkward *maybe I'd have to think of leaving* she meant that I should stay a while longer just the same.

I didn't see her again for another two years.

By then I had already graduated from college and was working. When we bumped into each other one day, I was almost indifferent, glad to be indifferent, eager to show that I was indifferent. It cost me almost nothing to say, "I was madly in love with you once." I made certain she knew I was speaking postmortem, though I feared I was trying too hard for someone who had given up trying. Together, we made light of our first kiss on that night of miracles. We made light of the people who had watched us from the other tables. We made light of her mother sleeping in the room next to the kitchen. "I live alone now," she said as we strolled to Thompson Street. Walking her to the door of her building I hesitated a moment and then, without knowing what else to do, said goodbye, abruptly. "I thought you'd come upstairs," I heard her say. I went upstairs, almost reluctantly.

Until today, what I remember of the time we spent together in the late spring of 1974 is the sight of MacDougal Street every morning, the smell of cigarettes and roasted coffee beans hovering over the sidewalks in the sun.

Three weeks later, we argued. A week after that, a friend wrote me a prescription for Valium. I showed her the prescription. "Is that supposed to move me?" she asked. Instead, she moved in with someone else.

The landlord, an Italian, had taken a liking to me. Did I want to assume her lease for the next six months? I did. One day, by common agreement, I

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left for a few hours and when I returned everything that was hers was gone. As I looked around for the farewell note that I knew it wasn't in her style to write, I vowed never to fall in love in quite that way again, and certainly never with a woman I couldn't understand, with whom what I thought was right was always wrong, except when I was sure it was wrong.

II

THE NUMBER in the back of the Liddell & Scott *Lexicon* means nothing to me now, but the pain it inscribes is hardly gone at all. I find it on the pavements of MacDougal Street on steamy midsummer afternoons when the heat is unbearable and when, no matter how often they sprinkle the street or scour the sidewalks, something like a long, sleek blemish refuses to wash off. It never goes away, never went away, but stands there as one of those moments that cut us in two, with a before and after that stare uncomprehendingly at each other like two strangers on opposite sidewalks, each looking away as their eyes meet, never for a second realizing that what lies between them is not just a missed opportunity but a possibility that is still there, that beckons still.

So here I stand a quarter-century later.

It is late December, a weekday afternoon, past four-thirty, and I'm on the corner of MacDougal and Bleecker on my way to the Peacock Caffè a few blocks north. The day is just beginning to darken. After heavy showers, everything glistens, the streetlights especially, speckling the wet pavement from one end of the street to the next. I am very early, a rare occurrence, enjoying this slow, damp, dreamy walk to Greenwich Avenue.

I like four-thirty. People are just beginning to come out of work, and there's a touch of indecision in the city—as if it's too late to start anything new and yet still early enough to take a stab at it. People are strolling about, taking their time, avoiding something they should be doing, caught in this interim dreamspace that is neither day nor night, hardly cold enough to prevent an extended walk and yet, for me, almost cold enough to look forward to a warm drink with my wife at the Peacock.

If I were an Elizabethan playwright I'd seize on a moment like this and call it an island, not off the coast of Naples as in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* but an island in time, wherein one or more shipwrecked travelers have suddenly been cast ashore and, with spellbound startled eyes, find themselves suspended for a while at four-thirty between a falafel stand and a pastryshop, or between MacDougal as it looks now and MacDougal as it looked in the late 1960's.

But I am also reminded of the fifty-two-year-old Stendhal, sitting exhausted one warm day in September 1835 on a tiny bench along a solitary pathway by Lake Albano near Rome. Without knowing it, perhaps, he has picked this spot quite appropriately, for it is situated right behind one of the stops in the local reenactment of the stations of the cross. Here Henri Beyle, a.k.a. Stendhal, a.k.a. Dominique, a.k.a. Henri Brulard, a.k.a. so many other pseudonyms, contemplates the stations of his life.

How does one of the most unfortunate lovers in the history of French literature begin piecing together the fragments of his existence? One by one, Stendhal begins to scratch in the sand, in shorthand, the names of the women he has loved. This is how he charts, how he connects, the stations of his life, a life lived or rather told under the sign of Venus—even though, in his own words, "with all of these [women], as with others, I've always been a child; and I've had very little success."

The abbreviated names are V, An, Ad, M, Mi, Al, Aine, Apg, Mde, C, G, Aur, and finally Mme Azur. These are the women he has loved. Next to one of them, Mme Azur, he writes, characteristically enough, "whose first name I forget." Another, Angela Pietragrua, is mentioned twice (once as An and once as Apg), because the two of them had resumed an affair after a hiatus of a few years.

"In fact," Stendhal writes, "I've possessed only six of the women I've loved." *Dans le fait, je n'ai eu que six de ces femmes que j'ai aimées.*

I was twenty-one when I first read *The Life of Henri Brulard*, where Stendhal's list appears, and what baffled me most about the list was its length. Stendhal had loved and suffered for twelve women. I had scarcely loved one. I was intimidated, dwarfed. It would never have occurred to me that, 30 years later, I'd be standing on MacDougal Street trying to sort out the meaning behind my own list and envying the young man who'd have envied the loves I'd known.

I have stopped outside of Caffè Reggio and am looking through the large glass panel. The place hasn't changed at all: dark, intentionally faded interior, the old brown furniture lifted, as it seems, from yard sales in Naples or Palermo, the rounded green awning with the inscription "Since 1927," the two large glass panels with another tiny one in-between, the little alcove in the back that presumably once housed a telephone booth, the glass door that opens with an intrusive squeak, making everyone turn and

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stare forbiddingly. I wonder whether I'll ever overcome the sense of being mildly unwelcome, of never really being "in" enough or bold enough or old enough to enter this tiny enclave of the happy few—jet-setters, movie-star types dressed in black, everyone so visibly, transcendentally, but unselfconsciously sexual, as if it is always I and no one else with the dirty mind. That much has never changed.

I don't know why I'm standing outside here, nor can I understand the words I keep saying to myself: *nothing has changed.* I am feeling very awkward, like a boy screwing up the courage to buy a pack of cigarettes or a jealous lover spying on his beloved. A man from the nearby falafel place has come out and is watching me. The waiter inside Caffè Reggio catches me staring and assumes an inquisitive gaze. I was here many waiters ago, I want to boast, but it's nothing to boast about. A man sitting at a table by the window lifts his face and from behind the large pane clearly suggests I'm intruding on his space. I affect the focused expression of a subway rider trying to look over and behind the passenger occupying the seat in front of the map. Have I found what I'm looking for? he seems to ask. What I'm looking for has no name, I want to reply, it's like seeking a dead person—me, younger—at a cocktail party.

I am of course staring at the very last table in the corner, the one cast in a still darker shade of brown. But nothing comes: no revelation, no éclat. Should I, like a high-school student, like Stendhal in the sand, take out a pen knife and carve into its old brown surface the coded names of the women I've loved? With each new love, we invent a new way of charting our lives, of realigning our internal calendars. But where one sorrow should bury another, two sorrows coexist instead, face to face like the young queen and the old queen sitting across the dinner table, each wishing the venom in her eyes were in the other's food—except that the two are in me and the poison I take, I make.

This is Stendhal's narrative: at the time he knew A, he had no idea he'd meet B, or that C would devastate his life so thoroughly as to eclipse both A and B. And yet, despite everything, there was D waiting around the corner, D who would truly destroy him and before whom his suffering for C would pale into a trivial skit, so that a few years later when he did run into C, all he could think was, "When I lost her and thought life had ended, life hadn't even started. How can this be?" But as it turned out, this brief interlude with C, which was to salve an unhealed wound, proved worse than any injury inflicted by D, and one evening, totally distraught, he found himself knocking at D's door to forget C.

It would take nothing really for me to open the door to Caffè Reggio, where I haven't been in at least two years, and step into this island in time, into this bubble. If I'm hesitating it's not because I'm afraid of slipping into one of the many four-thirties I've known on this sidewalk but because I don't have the least inkling of whether it is an old fantasy I am tempted to revisit, a new fantasy, a memory, or an intricate cluster of unexpiated desires hovering not just over all the coffeehouses I've known in this neighborhood but over the evenings I've passed by, the films I've seen, the women I've fallen in and out of love with, down to those I never dared speak to but whose spirit all the same is forever present on the glistening pavements of MacDougal Street.

WHAT DO I really want from this place? Whom am I hoping to find here? Am I afraid of walking in and finding it filled, as in Fellini's *8 1/2*, or Eric Rohmer's *Chloe in the Afternoon*, with all the women I've known, sitting at all the tables we've sat at, in the ultimate surprise party from hell? Or am I afraid of finding it totally empty but for one table, occupied by one person, sitting as I pictured her sitting exactly 30 years ago, to remind me that I've never forgotten her, that she too may have never forgotten me, and that even if eventually I *have* managed to forget her and ceased to love her, she remains, to use Nietzsche's term, the "star love" of my life, the quasar that has lost its light but continues to exert silent gravitational pull on every planet I've since encountered?

I decide to walk in.

I sit at the old familiar table. I order Earl Grey tea. I take out a sheet of paper. I draw up a list of names. Then I list the films I remember seeing near here, and the number of times I've come here with someone and ordered Earl Grey tea. I play with numbers, with dates, trying to discern a pattern. I may as well be drawing up a list of stops on the Broadway local.

Faced with the "bizarreness"—his word—of his life with women, Stendhal, who was as interested in tactical seduction as he was in romantic bliss, arrived at the ideological compromise whose lessons I had absorbed in *The Red and the Black*. If you love someone, you will find it very difficult to speak your heart. But speak from the heart you must—or, if you cannot speak, you should at least behave candidly, frankly, and naturally. But Stendhal, an ex-mathematician, was also shrewd enough to catch the unstated term here: willed sincerity is just another mode of seduction, perhaps the most cun-

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ning mode of all. If, therefore, you are to be truly sincere, you must do the opposite of what you think you *should* be doing. That is, if you love someone, be cold. *Froid* is one of Stendhal's busiest adjectives.

Nothing could have served Stendhal worse than this advice. Ultimately, we are as disingenuous with ourselves as we think others are with us. And yet, even though I'm not an Elizabethan, and not a 19th-century man, this disingenuousness—or, perhaps better, counterintuitiveness—speaks to my experience of life and of love just as it does to my experience of literature.

III

TOWARD THE end of the year in which we had finally gotten together and then broken apart, I was working late one night in what had been her apartment when someone buzzed downstairs. I asked who it was. "*C'est moi.*" For the life of me I couldn't place the voice, though it wasn't unfamiliar. Someone who spoke French and knew me but whose voice I didn't recognize: it made no sense. Without thinking, I had immediately discounted the first person who crossed my mind; she didn't know a word of French. Besides, since I'd often caught myself thinking I was hearing her voice, hoping it was her voice when I knew it couldn't possibly be, I'd trained my mind—counterintuitively—to spot itself playing tricks on me. I asked again. Through the static the exasperated voice finally blurted out: "Me, I said."

I began to suspect it might actually be her; but the thought seemed to be coming the long way around and from very far away, like a plane bound for America that has landed in some abandoned airfield in Australia after many refueling stops in Europe and East Asia. But this could not be. Only then did I grasp—counterintuitively—why I had failed to recognize the voice. It wasn't really speaking French, it was imitating someone speaking French. She was—it took me a while to realize—imitating *me*, assaulting me with exaggerated familiarity to hide her awkwardness. And this, her awkwardness, was what finally told me it could only be she and no one else.

She stepped out of the old elevator. Her long black hair was matted on her face, she was all wet, and I couldn't tell whether it was from the rain or from crying. "Come in." I gave her a bathrobe. She undressed in front of me. Then she went to the linen closet and removed a large towel to dry her hair. In her place, I'd have pretended to forget where everything was after six months. Was this a good sign (I've come back, let's start all over again, I haven't forgotten anything)? Or a bad sign (don't go getting any ideas, I've got other worries on my mind)?

I took her wet clothes, hung them over the radiator, lit the stove, made tea. Shivering, she sat on a chair and gulped down her tea in hasty sobs. "He's thrown me out, you know." I rubbed her feet with alcohol and put wool socks on them: you'll sleep here tonight, I said, we'll talk in the morning. "He's thrown me out, you know," she repeated. Revenge is never kind. This was the woman I would have done anything to kill, now I'd do anything to kill the man who'd taken her from me only to do this to her.

She talked until very late. At one point I asked if she wanted some brandy. She said she wanted Valium instead. Did I still have those pills I'd taken because of her? I did. How many did she want? The whole bottle, she said with a smile. I said I'd gladly give it to her except that I needed one myself that night.

When it was time to go to bed she said, "I don't want to sleep alone." She had come to me to forget him, just as the pills I had taken to survive her loss would now help her survive his.

Two days later, she brought over her things. At night, when she slept, she muttered his name, or sometimes started with his and ended with mine. Within weeks, she managed to run into him again and sleep with him, reporting to me—hoping to please or appease me—that she'd called him by my name. I feigned exaggerated jealousy, perhaps to conceal my jealousy. Let's end it right now, I said. She did not argue. Now I must go back to him to forget you, she said, almost sheepishly, sensing the irony and making light of it, which was her way of suffering. We made up. Besides, I'd soon be moving to Boston. Did I still want the apartment? No, she could have it back.

I remember our last evenings in a crowded Caffè Reggio in that winter of 1974 and how sad we both were, neither one of us in love with the other and yet thrown together like opposites who'd finally understood that opposites seldom attract. She had lost the man she loved. And I too had just lost a girl I'd met over the summer. We spoke about both, at once pleased that we could and yet piqued that each had had someone else, each finding that a heart can ache in two places at the same time and still spit both venom and its antidote without skipping a beat.

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She desperately wanted him to catch us at the back corner table, and I desperately wanted to be seen by my summer flame. It brought us together, and as we walked up and down Thompson and Sullivan I forced an arm around her and she yielded and kissed me, thinking, perhaps, if he wants to so badly, let him, mistaking it for passion, not knowing that I'd already second-guessed her kisses and could tell they were no different from my own. They were third-party kisses; we kissed as we loved, with our eyes open, locked in a counterfeit embrace, which, perhaps, still counted for something.

We said goodbye near Washington Square, promising to write or call. But I never heard from her again. The last time I saw her handwriting was on an envelope she forwarded to my address in Boston. It was a letter from my previous girlfriend, asking why I'd disconnected the phone.

THERE MUST be a meaning to this pattern. But I don't think I know its name. So let me go back further, to the beginning.

One night in the late 1960's, I caught sight of a beautiful girl in the library who looked quite familiar. When our eyes met again, she smiled, I smiled back, and, without thinking, finally mustered the courage to speak. I know you from somewhere. Yes, you look familiar, too. We dropped a few names: friends, places, teachers, courses, parties. No, no one in common, nothing in common, totally different tastes. It was only as we were talking that I began to realize—and from the look in her eyes it seemed she sensed it before I did—that we knew each other from having stared at each other one day on a subway platform, and again a few days later, and again that very morning, and that if, in speaking to her, I had now crossed a line my own shyness should never have allowed me to cross, it was only by mistake, which is how I always ask for the things I want in life, whereas she, by thinking I'd had the gumption to pretend I'd forgotten where we'd seen each other before, had, by another twisted process, made a corresponding mistake.

Had I figured all this out before opening my mouth, my life would have taken an entirely different turn. I wouldn't have spoken to her, wouldn't have known so much heartache, wouldn't have learned to read life inside out, wouldn't have lived it as though it were a downhill slalom studded with buried obstructions and perilous counterturns.

All this, and more, is still inscribed in the telephone number in the back of my *Greek-English Lexicon*. When I said to her, "Then let me have your number," as though it were the most casual request in the world, the way she volunteered to write it down seemed so amused, so serene, and so propitious that even today it is difficult to read in the royal blue of her handwriting a hint of what was awaiting me at MacDougal and Bleecker.

Which is where I'm standing now. An hour has passed since I walked into Caffè Reggio. Against the glistening reflection of the streetlights and other signs of an evening already wearing into night, a setting sun has just broken through the clouds to cast a hazy orange glow—the last few minutes of an afternoon that almost never was. Dusk has barely even started, the day—as people leaving a matinée are always pleased to find—is still young, drinks and dinner with the person I love most are still ahead of me, and this tale I have remembered after so many years has, once again, been put behind me.

And yet, as I hurry on my way to the Peacock, I am grateful beyond words that I can remember, grateful even to know that, despite the far better things life has given me since, the one moment I'll never be able to live down is when a girl, whispering from across a narrow table in her mother's kitchen, offered me a blank check to life that I, almost without thinking, turned into a raincheck.

Perhaps I would do no differently today—and therein lies not only sorrow but comfort. To measure time by how little we change is to find how little we've lived, but to measure time by how much we've lost is to wish we hadn't changed at all. There are ledgers that stay open all our lives long, scores we'll never repay. Staring at them is like wandering onto Prospero's island, where strange spirits speak the truth with forked tongues.

For the tempest is not just what brings us to the island. The tempest *is* the island. It is the insoluble knot we can't leave behind but bring with us wherever we go, it is who we are when we are alone and no one else is looking, it is our tussle with the one person we can never outgrow and never, really, become. It is, in the end, how we make sense of our lives when we are sure there is no sense to be made.

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Intellectuals—Public and Otherwise

Joseph Epstein

I CANNOT recall when I first heard or read the ornate term "public intellectual," but I do recall disliking it straightaway. I felt like a man who has been used to buying the same solid shirt for years—white oxford cloth, button-down collar—and one day enters his favorite store only to discover that someone has gone and added epaulets to it. When I noted the people who were being identified as public intellectuals, I knew that to superfluity had been added gross imprecision. Here was a phrase, in short, that absorbed no truth whatsoever.

Yet "public intellectual" seems to have taken stronger and stronger hold, popping up in print with little or no explanation of what it means. The late Lionel Trilling, one reads, "was the public intellectual and mainstay of *Partisan Review*." Edward Said, one learns, "is an American by default and a public intellectual by virtue of the mean accidents of political history." Richard A. Posner and Ronald Dworkin are "two of the nation's most admired public intellectuals," while the late Noel Annan was "as pure an example of the public intellectual as [one] could summon up." Best of all, I recently came across the news that at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton there is a full course of study designed to prepare you to become a public intellectual, providing a Ph.D. in whatever it is public intellectuals are supposed to do.

In Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* (1987), the term gets a fairly good workout, and it may be that Jacoby first put it into circulation. In his own usage, a public intellectual "contributes to public discussion" and is also "an incorrigibly independent soul answering to no one," committed "not simply to a professional or private domain but to a public world—and a public language, the vernacular." This definition supplies a pair of pants baggy enough for both Walter Cronkite and Jackie Mason. In the usage of others, a public intellectual emerges as an academic specialist who can write the op-ed piece or do the political talk show. For still others, the public intellectual is someone vaguely intelligent who happens to appear before the public: Ted Koppel, say, or Frank Rich.

As for intellectual, plain and simple, that is, or was, something else altogether. I cannot recall when I first heard this term, either, but I do vividly recall my first experience of the phenomenon itself. In my third year as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, I discovered the periodical room at Harper library and what were then called little magazines. ("Our intellectual marines," wrote W. H. Auden, "landing in little magazines.") The year was 1957, and these magazines were still at high tide. I read as many as I could find, but particularly *Partisan Review* (now often described as, in those days, the house organ of American in-

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tellectuals), COMMENTARY, and *Encounter*. The last of these, which came out in England, was co-edited by the poet Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol (who had formerly been on the editorial staff of COMMENTARY), and had only recently begun publication.

I find it difficult to do justice to the deep pleasure I took in these magazines. Education, as everyone knows, is a disorderly business. It is chiefly available through four different means: schools, new and used bookstores, conversation with intelligent friends, and good magazines. For me, coming to them pretty much tabula rasa, these intellectual magazines were easily the key element. Although the University of Chicago had taught me who were the essential writers and which were the perennially important questions—no small thing, granted—I had had no great teachers or important educational experiences in its classrooms and lecture halls. Serious learning commenced in the periodical room at Harper library, and continued for a great many years afterward as I searched out back issues of the intellectual magazines and fell upon them with the combined ardor of a collector and a glutton. They made me want to be an intellectual, a term I then took as an unqualified honorific.

I was not wholly unprepared for the call. Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which I had recently read, had utterly dazzled me by the brilliance of Weber's historical connections and the power of his formulations. But what the intellectual magazines showed me was that not all brilliance was in the past—that some very interesting minds were still at work.

Some of the names I came across in the pages of these magazines were European and already known to me from my general reading: André Malraux, Ignazio Silone, F.R. Leavis, Bertrand Russell. (These were the days when Americans still existed in a condition of cultural inferiority vis-à-vis Europe.) Others I discovered there for the first time: Lionel Trilling, Isaiah Berlin, Philip Rahv, Sidney Hook, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Richard Crossman, George Lichtheim, Harold Rosenberg, Hannah Arendt, Saul Bellow, Mary McCarthy, Goronwy Rees, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Leslie Fiedler, Clement Greenberg, Delmore Schwartz, James Baldwin, Irving Howe, William Barrett, Hilton Kramer, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, John Berryman. These writers introduced me to still others—Alexander Herzen, François Mauriac, Paul Valéry, Max Beerbohm—and to scores of subjects of which I was still ignorant; and so the net of my intellectual acquaintance grew wider and wider.

ALTHOUGH COMMENTARY, *Partisan Review*, and *Encounter* published fiction and poetry, some of it quite distinguished, at their heart was the discursive essay: ambitious in choice of subject, sometimes aggressively polemical in spirit, unhesitant in authority, often brilliant in execution. Looking back at representative American exemplars of the form, I would single out Robert Warshow and Dwight Macdonald. Warshow, an editor at COMMENTARY, died in 1955 at the age of thirty-seven, and I read him only later, when I began rummaging through back issues. Macdonald had been an editor of *Partisan Review* and then, after breaking with his colleagues over World War II, to which he claimed moral objections, veered off to edit his own magazine, *politics*.

In his brief career, Warshow wrote more about the movies than about any other subject, but neither he nor Macdonald—who also wrote about the movies—can be said to have had an intellectual specialty. Nor was either of them a scholar, though Macdonald's best book, an anthology titled *Parodies*, contains much genuine scholarship. Neither man was remotely academic in either style or spirit; both were genuine freelances, writing about subjects they found interesting and attempting to draw out their widest implications.

Warshow's "The Gangster As Tragic Hero" (1948) provides a perfect illustration of what I have in mind. In this essay, Warshow sets out to discover both the real meaning of American gangster movies and the source of their attraction. The distillation is highly concentrated; it takes him fewer than 3,000 words to make his case.

Inherent to our pleasure in gangster movi
Warshow asserts in "The Gangster as Tr
Hero," is the element of sadism: in watching
"we gain the double satisfaction of partici
vicariously in the gangster's sadism and ther
it turned against the gangster himself."
deeper significance of these movies lies i
they encapsulate "the intolerable dilem
feel about success. The gangster, in br
we want to be and what we are afrai
come." And so the effect of the gan

> is to embody this dilemma in th
> gangster and resolve it by
> dilemma is resolved because i
> ours. We are safe; for the m
> quiesce in our failure, we c

Warshow's essay is the act
most characteristic. Here is
es no specialized knowle

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dinary fund of personal experience. He does what he does with no other aid but the power of his mind. He has seen the same movies we have all seen. But he happens to have seen more in them than the rest of us recognized was there. "This interior need to penetrate beyond the screen of immediate concrete experience," wrote the sociologist Edward Shils, "marks the existence of the intellectuals in every society." A precise description, that, of Robert Warshow at work.

Very different from Warshow, Dwight Macdonald was dashing and slashing in his prose, more amusing than penetrating in his thought. In both culture and politics he assumed the stance of the immitigable highbrow. Whenever capitalism played a large part in any work of art or cultural production, he tended to attack it. He was death on middlebrow culture, writing rollicking blasts at Encyclopedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World* ("The Book of the Millennium Club") and the New English Bible. He could ambush a bestseller, and in the case of James Gould Cozzens ("By Cozzens Possessed") dealt so devastating a blow to the novelist that, even now, nearly 45 years later, his literary reputation has yet to recover.

Macdonald's opinions were, however, less than original; they were those of the herd of independent minds, in Harold Rosenberg's withering phrase. Although Macdonald attempted a systematic formulation of his theory of culture in a lengthy essay, "Masscult & Midcult" (1960), it was riddled with contradictions and, theoretically, a mess. Late in life, at a symposium at Skidmore College, he acknowledged that he was at his best as a counterpuncher, writing against some work or idea. "Every time I say 'Yes,'" he remarked, "I get in trouble." His last big Yes was on behalf of the student rebellion at Columbia in 1968, where Yes was once again the wrong answer.

It was from Dwight Macdonald—whom I can hardly read today but who once gave me so much pleasure—as well as from Robert Warshow and a few other marines in little magazines (including Irving Howe and Paul Goodman) that I took much of my own notion of what constituted an intellectual. This exotic creature, they taught me, was a species of grand amateur—an amateur of the mind. He was distinguished from other mind workers, or intelligentsia, by his want of specialization. He knew not one but many things.

Unlike the scholar, for example, the intellectual did not work with primary sources, did not feel himself responsible for presenting the most accurate and detailed knowledge of his subjects, did not feel the need to back up his assertions with footnotes, did not seek out new factual material that might change the shape of a subject. True, there were scholars, scientists, occasionally artists, jurists, or even politicians who had the widest intellectual interests, but when they were functioning in their specialties they were not, strictly speaking, intellectuals.

The natural penchant of the intellectual was not to go deeper but wider—to turn the criticism of literature or art or the movies or politics into broader statements about culture. His lucubrations might have all sorts of consequences, but insofar as he was operating purely as an intellectual, he was less concerned with influencing policy, effecting change, or doing anything other than seeing where his ideas—and the boldness of his formulations—took him.

The intellectual, in the standard if unwritten job description, functioned best as a critic—be it stressed, an *alienated* critic—of his society. Guardian and gatekeeper, the intellectual had to be wary above all of the amorphous yet pervasive influence of Wall Street, Madison Avenue, the middle class, the middlebrow, the mainstream, the bourgeoisie, the big interests. In Dwight Macdonald's worldview, writers and intellectuals were always in danger of selling out to the devil, with the devil usually envisioned as Henry Luce and hell as Time, Inc.—where Macdonald once worked.

Where politics was concerned—and politics was always concerned—anti-Communism was permitted as an ideological component in the intellectual's makeup, or at least it was at the time my own intellectual aspirations took hold. (With the war in Vietnam, this, too, would become a contentious position.) But what was also assumed was a high reverence, theoretical and sentimental, for socialism. In those days—the late 1950's, the early 1960's—it did not seem possible to be an intellectual and not to be of the Left. This reverence for socialism was never entirely absent even in so otherwise independent-minded a figure as George Orwell.

If Warshow and Macdonald were representative intellectuals, Orwell was in many ways the perfect type, both in his strengths and in his limitations. He wrote well about politics, literature, and popular culture. He was devoted to truth-telling, even when that meant, as in the case of the truths he told about Communist totalitarianism, being cut off from the *bien-pensant* crowd of his day and from the journals that provided much of his income. He

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was also large-minded enough to be hospitable to ideas that went against his own, writing favorably, for example, about Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. Although neither right about everything nor entirely able to evade self-deception, Orwell probably had a higher truth quotient—especially when it came to difficult truths—than any other intellectual of the past century.

But if Orwell represented the type of the intellectual at his best, he also manifested a number of its limitations. He was clever, he was penetrating, he was even prophetic—and that is a lot—but no one could claim that he was deep. Like most modern intellectuals, he was insufficiently impressed with the mysteries of life, which is why his fiction so often seems stillborn. T. S. Eliot famously remarked of Henry James that "he had a mind so fine no idea could violate it." Eliot meant by this not that James was ignorant of ideas but that he was after a different, a more elevated, form of knowledge than was available through mere ideas. Except at odd moments, Orwell never quite progressed beyond ideas: their stranglehold suffocates not only *1984* and *Animal Farm* but even his less directly political fiction.

Still, better to be in the grip of ideas that happen to be true—as Orwell, for the most part, was—than of ideas that are false and trivial, or odious and brutal. If the social and political speculations of intellectuals can lend charm to life—risky generalizations, especially those that sound cogent, are among the best stimulants to thought—the claim of the intellectual to be more than a high-order kibitzer often remains fairly thin. Like the kibitzer, the intellectual stands at the rim of the game, risking nothing by his assertions. An American intellectual once announced to my friend Edward Shils that, when it came to the politics of the state of Israel, he was of the war party. "Yes," Shils said in reporting this conversation to me, "Israel will go to war, and he'll go to the party."

BUT, THEN, intellectuals have never been known for their deep loyalty. This is a point underscored by the late Noel Annan in his recent book *The Dons*, in which he notes that intellectuals "vacillate and move gingerly to judgments about people, slide away at first hint of trouble, . . . and then decamp when their friend is in trouble, or worse, when he is in disgrace." Herman Wouk made essentially this point, a long while ago, in *The Caine Mutiny*, whose one really shameless character is the intellectual—played perfectly by Fred MacMurray in the movie—who goads the executive officer into wrongful action and then backs away when the going gets tough. The larger point is that you probably do not want an intellectual in your foxhole.

The historian Richard Hofstadter, noting the "passion for justice" of intellectuals, wrote that "one thinks here of Voltaire defending the Calas family, of Zola speaking out for Dreyfus, of the American intellectuals outraged at the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti." Yet such can be the fecklessness of many intellectuals that this same passion for justice has also surfaced as a penchant for mischief-making, and on a monumental scale. Next to alienation, one of the most enticing ideas to intellectuals has been revolution. This is no doubt partly because a number of actual intellectuals—Leon Trotsky, Zhou Enlai, Che Guevara—have played prominent (and in no way salubrious) roles in actual revolutions. As a young intellectual-in-training, I knew more about the Russian than about the American Revolution; after all, intellectuals had been much more conspicuous in the runup to the former. Most intellectuals have felt that when the revolution arrives, not the least of its important results will be a general recognition of the importance of you'll never guess who.

Even when they have not lent their energies to promoting schemes for human betterment that depend on the mass coercion of real human beings, the intellectuals' overdependence on ideas, and their consequent detachment from reality, have often turned them into little demons of ignorant subtlety. During World War II, a number of left-wing British intellectuals were convinced that what really lay behind America's entry into the war was the hope of stopping the spread of socialism in England—prompting George Orwell's acid remark that "Only an intellectual could be so stupid." When Barry Goldwater ran for President of the United States in 1964, Hannah Arendt, certain that America was on the edge of being taken over by fascists, sought an apartment in Switzerland. Susan Sontag, in 1982, announced to a New York audience her belated conclusion that Communism should no longer be the name of any thinking person's desire but was rather to be regarded as "fascism with a human face." To those who had troubled over the years to follow Sontag's own public imprecations against Western democracy or against the "white race" as the "cancer of human history," or her earnest championing of Communist North Vietnam as "a place which, in many respects, *deserves* to be idealized," her public change of mind, however carefully qualified, must have offered a moment of grim amusement. But her audience—in

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1982!—was nevertheless shocked by even so calibrated a defection, and she herself never again ventured to say anything remotely so out of line.

WRONG OR not, alienated or not, until the 1960's American intellectuals seemed to live easily if not prosperously enough, enjoying some of the comforts of a coterie existence. Not least among those comforts was the feeling of being vastly superior to their countrymen, of being among Stendhal's happy few. Unlike today's so-called public intellectuals, they were not invited to offer their opinions on radio and television, and their names were not much known outside the readership of the intellectual magazines.

Yet even in the 1940's and 50's, their influence was not negligible—though it might take a while to be felt. Edmund Wilson, perhaps the literary intellectual par excellence, had been a crucial figure in importing and explaining modernism in literature to an American audience, especially in his book *Axel's Castle* (1931), and in introducing readers to a vast international array of writers, living and dead. In the 1940's and 50's, Clement Greenberg had done something similar for Abstract Expressionism and the New York school in painting. Meanwhile, a number of men who wrote for the intellectual magazines—including James Agee, Irving Howe, and Louis Kronenberger—were also putting in time working for the devil himself at *Time* and *Fortune*; and so, in the sociological phrase, there was transmission of knowledge on this front, too. If one read both the intellectual magazines and that portion of the popular press that had intellectual pretensions, one saw how the ideas from the former began to percolate down to the latter.

By the early 1960's, "percolate" would no longer accurately describe the quickness of this transaction. In those years Harold Rosenberg became the art critic of the *New Yorker*, and Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, and Mary McCarthy also published there. Dwight Macdonald not only became a *New Yorker* writer but signed on to write about movies for *Esquire*. In 1963 and '64 respectively, Mary McCarthy's *The Group* and Saul Bellow's *Herzog* were best-sellers. In 1964, Susan Sontag wrote an essay in *Partisan Review*, "Notes on Camp," that resulted within what seemed a matter of weeks in the spread of the word "camp" to just about everywhere, including *Vogue*. Intellectuals had suddenly gone public; they, or at any rate some of them, were on the Big Board.

At least as significant for the new integration of intellectuals into American life was another development, an early sign of which was the appointment of Philip Rahv, one of the founding editors of *Partisan Review*, and Irving Howe, then the editor of *Dissent*, to professorships at the newly founded Brandeis University. Neither Rahv nor Howe had a doctorate or anything resembling an academic specialty; what they had was intellectual authority, and that, apparently, was now deemed enough. The postwar expansion of the universities would soon siphon away a larger number of such people—until, in the end, American intellectual life was itself all but siphoned away by the universities.

Sometimes this was literally so, as when first Rutgers and then Boston University took over *Partisan Review*, with Rutgers installing a full-time academic, Richard Poirier, as one of the magazine's editors. More generally, the acceptance of intellectuals into the American university dealt a serious blow to the freelance spirit. The successors to the older generation of American intellectuals—among them Richard Sennett, Marshall Berman, Morris Dickstein, and Louis Menand—now tended to operate with a net under them, the net known as academic tenure; and, though their pretensions might be intellectual, their style tended to be highly academic.

Still, apart from the absorption of intellectuals by the universities, it was really the decade of the 1960's that finished off the old intellectual life. Before the 60's, the issue that had most divided intellectuals was Stalinism. That rancorous and deadly quarrel was much on the minds of some participants in the political disputes that arose during the 1960's over the war in Vietnam, the Black Power movement, the meaning of urban riots, and the nature of America itself. The effect was momentous. As Midge Decter has recently written in COMMENTARY, "The 'partisan' community would become unstuck in the 60's, with several defections from among its ranks to the camp of the radical students, and would blow up even further in the 70's with the onset of neoconservatism."

IN TWO of his memoirs, *Breaking Ranks* (1979) and *Ex-Friends* (1999), Norman Podhoretz has chronicled this sundering of the community of intellectuals he once dubbed the Family, as well as his own emergence as a neoconservative. Behind much of the anger that greeted at least the first of these books was the implicit charge that Podhoretz had betrayed the very essence of the intellectual vocation as it had come to be defined: that is, he had refused to consider it his first duty to be unrelentingly critical of his own country, to maintain his alienation, and to assert his disdain for middle-class life.

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But Podhoretz was not entirely alone. Owing to the 60's, others of us were coming to regard the so-called intellectual vocation, at least as now construed, as outmoded if not downright dangerous, both to the life of the mind and to the life of society. The word intellectual no longer seemed such a clear honorific, and the baggage that went with the job—the pose of alienation, the contempt for the social class of one's origin, the pretense of distaste for the culture of one's country—seemed false to our experience of life. When it came to the breakdown of the universities, the racial bullying of the Black Power movement, and the general destruction of standards in society, the intellectuals had by and large run with the pack. Later, having long deserted such convictions as they might once have had, most intellectuals chose to stand aside when culture itself came under attack by the philistine forces of political correctness and radical feminism.

There were, admittedly, other factors at work in this decline. For one thing, recent decades have not exactly provided a hardy diet of ideas of the kind once on the intellectual's table. Consider Marxism in politics and modernism in the arts, the staples of the old *Partisan Review*. The former, with its prediction of ultimate revolution, is now a dead letter; party politics, once considered beneath the interest of an American intellectual, is now all that is left to him. Modernism, now more than a century old with many great discrete works to its credit, was always connected to an interest in the avant-garde; but the contemporary avant-garde, for the most part a mélange of political yahooism, in-your-face nastiness, and sexual liberationism, can hardly hold the interest of anyone seriously devoted to art. As for other big-system ideas once the meat and drink of intellectuals—including Freudianism—they have taken a ferocious drubbing over the past quarter-century, while structuralism, deconstruction, and the rest of the theory stew have proved digestible only by academics.

Then, too, the very notion of the sell-out, once so dear to intellectual thought, has become murky in the extreme. Nowadays, if one is sufficiently antinomian, one is likely to find one's art sponsored by Mobil Oil, one's novel receiving a six-figure advance from a major publisher, or oneself put on the faculty at Princeton. The problem for the talented is no longer selling out, but deciding where—and when—to buy in.

Another factor working against the idea of the traditional intellectual is the greater degree of specialization that infects the social sciences, literary studies, and philosophy. As recently as the 1960's, Lewis Mumford and Edmund Wilson, nonacademics both, could mount full-scale attacks on the heavily pedantic Modern Language Association editions of Emerson, Twain, and other American writers, inspiring sufficient discomfort among the officials in charge to make them feel the charges had to be answered. I am not sure there is an intellectual alive today who commands the authority to do anything similar.

And so the traditional intellectual has been replaced by a new type, the public intellectual, a figure who as likely as not retains all or most of the political attitudes of the 60's, suitably updated for the moment, and who has become adept at packaging them in fancy academic dressing. These are the Edward Saids and Ronald Dworkins of our time, the Richard Rortys and Cornel Wests, the Martha Nussbaums and Stanley Fishes, the Catharine MacKinnons and Peter Singers. Unlike the unattached intellectuals of earlier days, such people usually have university careers and arrangements at influential publications. Columnists, professors writing on subjects of putative contemporary relevance, soon, if Florida Atlantic University has its way, full-fledged Ph.D.'s in public intellectuality itself—they are the inheritors of a mantle for which one now qualifies not by any particular mental power but by going public with one's intelligibility and one's mere opinions.

Words change for a reason, generally to fit changes in the world. We thus now have the empty term public intellectual, because the real thing, the traditional intellectual, is on his way out. As for me, harshly though I have written about the traditional intellectual, I now find myself—like Norman Podhoretz at the close of *Ex-Friends*—rather sorrowful at his departure from the scene. What once distinguished him was a certain cast of mind, a style of thought, wide-ranging, curious, playful, genuinely excited by ideas for ideas' sake. Unlike so many of today's public intellectuals, he was not primarily a celebrity hound, a false philosopher-king with tenure, or a single-issue publicist. An elegantly plumed, often irritating bird, the traditional intellectual was always a minuscule minority, and now he is on the list of endangered species. Anyone who was around in his heyday to see him soar is unlikely to forget the spectacle.

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ART

Modernism, American-Style

Steven C. Munson

Modern Starts: People, Places, Things, which was on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from October 7, 1999 to March 14, 2000, was the first of three exhibitions organized as part of the museum's millennial celebration, *MoMA 2000. Modern Starts* focused on the years 1880 to 1920. The next installment, *Making Choices*, covers the years 1920 to 1960—it is now on view through August 22—and the final installment will cover the period from 1960 to the present. All three are intended to showcase what is unquestionably one of the finest and most important collections of modern art in the world.

And what a showcase it is. One could easily have spent several hours a day over a span of several days and still not have seen everything in *Modern Starts*. One could also have chosen to ignore the tripartite thematic arrangement devised to present the museum's permanent collection in a "new" way. For the best of these works remain timelessly fresh and afford seemingly inexhaustible pleasures.

To take but a few highlights: there was the impossibly coherent Fauve landscape, *Bridge over the Riou* (1906), by André Dérain, in which the painter laid down, in daubs, strips, and patches, combinations of color that seem both wildly out of control and completely self-modulating at the same time. Or one could dwell on a light-inflected Cubist still life by Picasso, or a series of haunting color woodcuts by Edvard Munch. And then there were two landscapes by Cézanne, painted years apart, the former showing a well-rendered scene and the latter his mature method, an extraordinarily subtle and infinite patchwork of color strokes that pointed the way beyond Impressionist realism to the modernists' concern with the autonomy of the work of art itself.

It was, indeed, precisely this concern that coursed through *Modern Starts* like an animating force, leading the viewer past and through the multimedia groupings, anachronistic juxtapositions, and mixing-up of works of varying quality to fasten on one great painting after another. Giorgio de Chirico's *Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure)* [1914]; Mondrian's *Church Façade* (1914); Kasimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying* (1915); Miro's *Birth of the World* (1925); Juan Gris's *The Sideboard* (1917)—all led into a world created by and contained by the canvas itself.

Perhaps no picture had as strong an impact in this regard as Matisse's *The Blue Window* (1913). That painting shows Matisse's characteristic collapse of interior and exterior space in a vertical format, with a stylized landscape framed by a window and mirrored by the floor of an equally stylized room. The simplified, mostly rounded forms of various things within and without—vases, flowers, lamps, tables, plates; trees, the roof of a house, a cloud, hills—are freely and loosely drawn and suspended in a single plane. Their "incorrect" proportions and the irregular pattern of color they create—the eye bounces from a series of yellow ochre shapes to smaller ones of green, blue, red, and orange set against the predominating green-tinged blue—allow them to echo, balance, or converge with

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each other in a peaceful harmony of stationary movement. Upon seeing this picture, one cannot help smiling out loud.

The Blue Window is a miracle of expressive power. And similar miracles were available in the other wonderful Matisses on display in *Modern Starts*, including *Goldfish and Palette* (1914), *View of Notre Dame* (1914), and *Gourds* (1915-16). The point brought home by these pictures, along with many others, was that modern art is, first but not last, a *visual* achievement. That is, what activates a viewer's response, not only mental but also emotional and spiritual, even physical, is the experience of seeing an arrangement of forms, of color and line. It is the arrangement that one seizes on first, and by which one is seized in turn; only then does one begin to notice the details of the composition.

This implies, of course, a subordination of the subject, whether it be a figure, a still life, or a landscape—and this subordination, too, was critical to the modernist enterprise. It is what made possible the extraordinary flowering of new types of painting so gloriously represented at MoMA. Just how glorious was plain enough to any visitor to *Modern Starts*. But just how extraordinary could be fully grasped only by setting this achievement—primarily a Parisian phenomenon—against other examples of modern art. Fortunately, an exhibit currently on view at the National Gallery in Washington provides an instructive basis of comparison.

*Twentieth-Century American Art: The Ebsworth Collection** is one of the most interesting among recent exhibits of the holdings of a single owner. Although it contains a number of works that represent American modernism at its best—they include Edward Hopper's *Chop Suey* (1929); Jackson Pollock's *Composition with Red Strokes* (1950); John Marin's watercolor *From Deer Isle, Maine* (1922); Arshile Gorky's *Good Afternoon Mrs. Lincoln* (1944); Stuart Davis's *Still Life in the Street (French Landscape)* [c. 1941]; Gaston Lachaise's sculpture, *Back of a Walking Woman* (c. 1922); and Alexander Calder's sculpture *Le Coq (Hen)* [c. 1944]—most of the other works in the show do not match this standard. They are of interest less for their quality, which varies greatly, than for what they reveal about the character of much of American modernist painting in the period before the emergence of Abstract Expressionism—and especially about how American modernism differed from its European progenitors.

One seemed here to be in the midst of a diverse group of artists working in different styles and in response to a variety of European influences. Andrew Dasburg's *Landscape* (1913), for example, shows the use of what this artist took to be Cézanne's technique. Yet Dasburg's choppy brushstrokes and patches of color are not integrated in such a way as to make one think, "That's a painting." Rather, what one thinks is, "That's a landscape scene done by someone trying to imitate Cézanne." Similarly, *Blue Diamond* (1940-41), by Ilya Bolotowsky, looks like a crooked Mondrian, but lacks Mondrian's sense of pictorial balance, purity, and tension-based harmony.

The point is not that imitation leads necessarily to failure or second-rate work; Matisse once said he would have been a fool not to have tried to imitate his predecessors. The point, rather, is that attempting to use or adapt another painter's technique, however perfected, is not by itself enough to create a painting that will genuinely hold our interest. I should add, of course, that success in such cases is a relative matter, and a number of the clearly derivative paintings in this show do in fact succeed to one degree or another, from William Glackens's *Café Lafayette (Portrait of Kay Laurell)* [1914], which looks like a Renoir, to David Smith's *Untitled (The Billiard Players)* [1936], inspired by Picasso's post-Cubist work; from the Cubist-style pictures by Byron Browne, Suzy Frelinghuysen, and Albert E. Gallatin, to Esphyr Slobodkina's Miro-esque abstraction, *Ancient Sea Song (Large Picture)* [1943-45], and Jean Xceron's *Composition 239A* (1937), which evokes Kandinsky.

Many of the works in this show seem to have little direct relation to one another. The big exception is a group of precisionist landscapes and still lifes, including pictures by Charles Sheeler, George Ault, Stefan Hirsch, and Francis Criss, which are characterized by geometrically delineated forms and an illusion of deep space. Some of these are quite striking in the refinement of their technique; and some, like Sheeler's *Catwalk* (1947) and Ault's *Fruit Bowl on Red Oilcloth* (1930), are compositionally strong as well. Yet, taken together, they tend to confirm the impression one has already gotten from more than a few of the other paintings on display: they are works that appropriate the formal innovations of European modernism but lack something essential to its spirit.

WHAT THAT something is can best be described as a convincing sense of artistic authority. In the case of the precisionists and a good number of the other painters, one can be even more specific: what is missing is an attitude of aesthetic ruthlessness.

A critic once said of Cézanne that he showed no "respect" for the things he painted. The same could be said of Matisse, who, to cite a well-known example, once painted a picture of his wife with a thick green line down the middle of her face. Such a lack of "respect" entails, or is synonymous with, a refusal to defer to artistic conventions, particularly those regarding beauty, and a determination to give priority not

* The exhibit, which runs until June 11, will also be at the Seattle Art Museum from August 10 to November 12.

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to the natural world but to the requirements of the life of the canvas.* In the making of a painting, this attitude requires that devotion to the "subject" be abandoned.

Yet as this exhibit makes clear, some such loyalty to the subject remained an important part of the sensibility of many American modernists. This is indicated, chiefly, by the fussiness of their work. This fussiness—particularly in the precisionist pictures—is not to be confused with the careful calibrations of, say, Juan Gris, the most "geometrical" of the three great Cubist painters (the other two being Brâque and Picasso), or of Mondrian, whose unique abstractions exude a similar exactitude of artistic thought. For Gris or Mondrian, the use of precisely gauged lines and forms reflected a deliberate casting-off of aesthetic inhibitions for the purpose of creating, within the boundaries of the canvas, a self-sustaining composition. For the Americans, by contrast, such precision seems to have been an expression of almost the opposite: a bottling-up designed to contain a romantic attachment to the things being represented, or to a way of life symbolized or recalled by those things.

The fastidiousness of the American precisionists' style gives to their depictions a quality that makes them seem both unreal and somehow sentimental at the same time. It is this quality that no doubt explains why, in the Washington exhibit, these works seem so at home with the examples of American surrealism, like Ault's *Universal Symphony* (1947) and Louis Guglielmi's *Mental Geography* (1938), or of modernist folk art, like Guglielmi's *Land of Canaan* (1934) and Marguerite Thompson Zorach's *The Picnic* (1928), that hang along with them.

Nor are these the only works in the show that partake, in one way or another, of a romantic spirit. One encounters it, in more muted ways, in some of the very first pictures one sees upon entering: Arthur Dove's *Moon* (1935), Georgia O'Keefe's *Sunrise* (1916), and Marsden Hartley's *Painting No. 49, Berlin (Portrait of a German Officer) (Berlin Abstraction)* [1914-15]. The feeling of these works seems somewhat at odds with their abstract means and tends to limit, to a greater or lesser extent, their vitality. One has a similar response to some of the show's other abstract works, which oddly seem to have turned the modern style of which they themselves are emulations into a "subject" of longing.

THE REPRESSED tension between the effort to apply modernist precepts and methods and the urge to express a characteristically American romantic outlook—whether on nature, the past, open spaces, or aspects of modern life—pervades much of the Ebsworth show, imposing a peculiar psychic burden on the viewer. In many cases, the works reflect an interest in realizing a desire for clarity, but what might be called the independent demands of the canvas are overridden. As a result, the pictures have an order about them, but it is an order disturbed. Ultimately, there is no release, only a nagging sense of lurking disharmony.

It is no doubt for these reasons that, when one reaches the next-to-last room and catches sight of Jasper Johns's large, vigorously brushed monochrome *Gray Rectangles* (1957), one feels a sudden sense of relief and a palpable breath of fresh air. Here at last, one thinks, looking at this painting done in what might seem the dullest color possible, is an artistic spirit that has set itself free and, in a truly novel way, created an object that envelops one in a flurry of visual and mental sensations.

Though Johns himself was not part of the group of painters known as the Abstract Expressionists who emerged in the 1940's and 50's, this entirely unromantic picture makes one realize just why they had the impact they did, and why they were so enthusiastically celebrated after they appeared on the scene. For they had found an American response to European modernism that went very far in actualizing its true spirit, rather than merely trying to imitate its forms or applying them in disharmonious ways.

Nor is this the only contribution made by the Ebsworth show to a historical understanding of the evolution of American art. In contrast to *Gray Rectangles*, but in line with some of the other paintings I have discussed, there in the last room of the exhibit was Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup with Can Opener* (1962), a work that makes unmistakably clear how Pop Art, too, whatever else one may say about it, draws from the well of America's romantic view of itself—and in particular from our ongoing and almost automatic nostalgia, even for the immediate past. Slick, gentle, and compositionally weak, *Campbell's Soup* may not be much of a painting; but thanks to this exhibit, and to the illuminating contrast it offers to MoMA's *Modern Starts*, we know where it came from.

* In *Point and Line to Plane*, Wassily Kandinsky wrote: "We must . . . definitely assume that every artist feels—even though unconsciously—the 'breathing' of the still untouched BP [basic plane, the surface on which the artist is to work] and that he feels—more or less consciously—a responsibility toward this being and is aware of the fact that frivolous abuse of it is akin to murder."

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MUSIC

The Trouble with Karajan

Terry Teachout

ONE OF the oldest classical-music jokes is thought to have been told originally about Herbert von Karajan. A Viennese cabbie picks up the Austrian conductor. "Where to, sir?" the driver asks. "It doesn't matter," Karajan replies. "They want me everywhere."

From the mid-50's on, the joke was almost true. In those decades before his death in 1989 at the age of eighty-one, Karajan was closely associated with three orchestras: the Berlin Philharmonic, of which he became principal conductor in 1955; London's Philharmonia Orchestra, in whose early success he played a key role; and the Vienna Philharmonic, which he led in operatic performances and symphonic concerts during most of his adult life, serving as director of the Vienna State Opera from 1957 to 1964. Other orchestras and opera houses clamored for his services, and his recordings for EMI and Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft (DGG) sold in vast quantities.*

But even though Karajan's name figures prominently on every list of major conductors of the 20th century, many critics—and many of his colleagues—have been reluctant to call him a truly great artist. While he is universally respected for his technical skills, his interpretations have been viewed with skepticism by a voluble minority of listeners who regard him as a phenomenally gifted but ultimately superficial virtuoso of the baton, almost an Austro-German counterpart of Leopold Stokowski.

Moreover, Karajan is widely held in contempt for his conduct during World War II. He joined the German Nazi party in 1935 and thereafter performed at official government functions, and the specter of his party past haunted him until his death. Indeed, it is not infrequently suggested that Karajan's aesthetic sensibilities were poisoned by politics—that he was in some elusive but fundamental sense a "Nazi artist."

Characteristic of this point of view was a famous 1948 review by Sir Isaiah Berlin, the English political philosopher, of a pair of concerts Karajan gave with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival:

> Karajan seems to conceive music as a series of self-contained episodes, and these he articulates one by one with a clarity of detail and a strictly calculated imperious organization of tempi and dynamics which moves with the remorseless accuracy of a dive-bomber intent upon its prey.

Even those unprepared to go this far have contended that Karajan's relentless drive for musical perfection was rendered morally suspect by his equally relentless will to personal power. Upon his death, one English obituary described him as "a bad man and in the final analysis a bad conductor as well." Sir Isaiah put it more adroitly when he called Karajan "a genius—with a whiff of sulphur about him."

But what, if anything, do such criticisms mean? Are they descriptive of actual musical events, or merely of Karajan's personal behavior? And to what extent should that behavior be held against Karajan the

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* Some of Karajan's best recordings are listed in the discography at the end of this essay.

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artist? These questions are addressed in exhaustive but absorbing detail in Richard Osborne's *Herbert von Karajan: A Life in Music*, published last year in Great Britain and now out in the U.S.*

Osborne, an English music critic, writes as a discriminating admirer of Karajan's conducting and as a no less open-eyed friend. In this book he has provided the first reliable account of Karajan's relationship with the Hitler regime, and the clearest discussion to date of how he emerged from the rubble of the Third Reich to become postwar Europe's most powerful musician. Into the bargain, he has produced perhaps the best biography ever written of a conductor.

HERBERT VON KARAJAN was born in Salzburg in 1908, the younger son of a surgeon and amateur clarinetist. He led a student orchestra for the first time in 1927, and made his professional debut two years later; around the same time, he first heard Arturo Toscanini, an experience that would leave a permanent mark on his own conducting style.

A short but handsome man with a gravelly voice, an aquiline profile, and a strikingly elegant manner of conducting, Karajan was the very model of the musical matinée idol. He quickly worked his way up the ladder of regional opera houses, and in 1935 the German city of Aachen offered him the job of general music director of its orchestra and opera company. Ordered to join the Nazi party as a condition of employment, the 27-year-old conductor complied unhesitatingly. Then and later, he had no discernible political convictions, and, Osborne convincingly shows, there is no reason to suppose his decision to join the party—which he would later dismiss as a "formality"—was anything other than an act of the purest opportunism. It certainly paid off: Karajan would debut in 1938 with the Berlin Philharmonic and the Berlin State Opera, and make his first commercial recordings that same year.

Karajan's emergence was, ironically, well-timed. Noted Jewish conductors like Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter had been forced into exile, and of those artists who stayed behind, only Wilhelm Furtwängler enjoyed an international reputation. Opportunities thus abounded for a talented newcomer—especially one who, like Karajan, was open to cosmopolitan influences. For, by 1938, the Austro-German musical world had become hopelessly provincial. Richard Strauss and Paul Hindemith were the only remaining German composers of the first rank; most of the region's leading instrumental soloists were Jewish and had fled; and most of the world's major orchestras were by then located in the U.S.

Younger than his German colleagues by as much as a quarter-century, Karajan represented a new style of musical thinking. Early exposure to Toscanini's Italian dynamism had created in him a taste for a leaner, less "metaphysical" approach to the Austro-German classics. Unlike Furtwängler, he was aware of and interested in musical modernism, and saw recording not as a chore but as an opportunity. Given his singular gifts, it was perfectly logical that he should have shot to the top of the German-speaking musical world.

But Karajan failed to reckon with the paranoia of Furtwängler, who regarded every other conductor as a threat, and a handsome young virtuoso as the biggest threat of all. So great was Furtwängler's loathing for Karajan that he refused to speak his name aloud, referring to him only as "K," and intrigued incessantly against him. Events conspired in Furtwängler's favor when, in 1942, Karajan married a woman (the second of his three wives) who had a Jewish grandparent and his career promptly stalled; causing still greater difficulties for the young virtuoso was that Adolf Hitler, who followed classical music in Germany closely, disliked his conducting and made no secret of the fact.

AT WAR'S end, Karajan returned from Germany to Austria. That he was known to have been in disfavor with Hitler worked to his advantage, as did his marriage to Anita Gutermann: in 1946, he was "denazified" by an Austrian tribunal and permitted to conduct in public. Shortly afterward, the English record producer Walter Legge heard Karajan rehearsing the Vienna Philharmonic and immediately signed him to an exclusive contract with EMI.

The hugely influential Legge, who also ran London's newest orchestra, the Philharmonia, was looking for a young, vital conductor who could polish this still-raw ensemble; unlike many of his colleagues, moreover, Legge was indifferent to Karajan's Nazi past (so much so that he would later marry the soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, another ex-party member, to whom he was introduced by Karajan). Both men passionately admired Toscanini, and both, though primarily German in their musical sympathies, were interested in modernizing the moribund German tradition.

Under Karajan's baton, the Philharmonia became not merely London's outstanding orchestra but one of the finest the world has ever known. His recordings for Legge with both the Philharmonia and the Vienna Philharmonic made him a star (and a wealthy man), thus giving him the bargaining chips he needed to take charge of his professional life. When Furtwängler died in 1955, the Berlin Philharmonic appointed Karajan its principal conductor—he insisted on lifetime tenure—and he signed a recording contract with DGG. Two years later, he took over the Vienna State Opera and the Salzburg Festival as well, thereby supplanting Legge as the most influential figure on the European classical-music scene.

* Northeastern University Press, 851 pp., $35.00.

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From the 50's onward, Karajan performed much of the standard operatic repertoire and most of the 19th-century classics, plus the music of Bach, Mozart, and Haydn (only the last-named of whom he conducted consistently well). In addition, he regularly programmed a select group of 20th-century works, among them Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra and *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*, Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* and Symphony of Psalms, Honegger's Third Symphony, Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, the later symphonies of Sibelius, and the more popular pieces of Debussy and Ravel. Over time, he learned to perform these non-German works convincingly and idiomatically, a stylistic achievement equaled by no other Austro-German conductor of his generation.

Karajan's conducting embodied apparently contradictory traits that in his middle years were successfully held in balance by his potent personality. Undemonstrative on the podium, he nonetheless exuded a charisma that some saw as studied and self-conscious. His interpretations had a forward thrust and clarity of line reminiscent of Toscanini, but with a greater emphasis on lyricism, sometimes to the point of enervating languor. He regarded music as a disembodied essence—he invariably conducted symphonic concerts with his eyes shut—but also showed an acute grasp of the practical aspects of music-making, and he was, when it suited him, a miraculously intuitive accompanist.

Those who dislike Karajan's conducting typically cite what one critic called "a quality of ruthlessness . . . that repels." And indeed no one has ever doubted Karajan's ability to hypnotize an orchestra into doing his bidding, whatever that might be. Gareth Morris, a longtime principal flutist of the Philharmonia, has left behind a vivid word portrait of Karajan conducting Ravel's *Bolero*:

> With the eyes closed and the hands barely chest high, Karajan gave us the beat with a single finger, and even that barely moved. . . . With each slight lift of the hands the tension became even greater. By the end of the piece, the hands were above his head. And the power of that final climax was absolutely colossal.

As this description suggests, Karajan was used to getting his own way. The Wagnerian soprano Birgit Nilsson, when asked what made the conductor angry, tersely replied: "resistance." In Nazi Germany, he had met with nothing but resistance; later on, at least for a while, he had to collaborate on more or less even terms with his peers, and for the most part did so effectively. But the moment finally arrived when it was no longer necessary to collaborate with anyone. He thereupon painstakingly shaped the Berlin Philharmonic into an instrument totally responsive to his will. Surrounding himself with an entourage of loyalists and toadies, he heard no artistic opinions contrary to his own. Eventually, he achieved a state of near-absolute power over his own creative life.

But in music as in every other sphere, absolute power, as Lord Acton noted, tends to corrupt absolutely. Karajan began to divert his formidable energies into undertakings to which his gifts were less well suited. He squandered millions of dollars on making visually dull films, which he edited himself, of his symphonic conducting. Always fascinated by the stage, he directed (and lit) his own operatic productions, which became increasingly turgid and lifeless. Unwilling to hire older singers with minds of their own, he instead cast young, pliant voices in overly demanding roles, and soon acquired a reputation for burning them out.

Before long, Karajan's conducting, too, began to show signs of self-indulgence. Though he endlessly recorded and re-recorded his core repertoire, the results rarely shed new interpretative light; more often, it seemed he was playing the life out of the pieces he loved best. As Richard Osborne writes:

> Even the greatest talent, pushed a hair's breadth in the wrong direction, can end up seeming like a parody of itself: the maniacal Toscanini, the blockish Klemperer, Gielgud crooning, Olivier ranting. Karajan's Achilles' heel would be a tendency to over-refinement and an excess of smoothness, the downside of his highly cultivated art.

This tendency became more pronounced as the 70's gave way to the 80's. Though capable of giving first-rate performances to the end of his life, Karajan became highly erratic in his last years when chronic ill health dogged him virtually without cease and he deteriorated visibly. The Berlin Philharmonic finally rebelled against his tyrannical ways, refusing to hire Sabine Meyer, a woman clarinetist who was a favorite of the conductor; in April 1989 he resigned his post, dying three months later.

Eleven years after his death, Karajan remains a touchstone of a certain kind of musical perfection. As the critic Tim Page wrote of his final New York performances with the Vienna Philharmonic:

> At intermission, when the last notes of the Schubert symphony had died away . . . I turned to a music-student friend of mine and said: "Never forget what you have heard here tonight. Never forget that an orchestra can play with such unity, such subtlety, such luxuriance of tone. You may never again hear such playing, but now you know that it can be done. We will remember. And Karajan set the standard."

Yet it was just this kind of perfection that other listeners have persisted in seeing as problematic. Is it possible, they ask, for orchestral

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playing to be too beautiful? The phrase itself suggests that something has gone wrong with a musical performance—that tonal refinement has been exalted at the expense of musical sense. As the Berlioz scholar David Cairns once complained: "so much beauty on the surface and so little music below it."

This does occasionally happen with Karajan, particularly in the music of Beethoven, where his conducting can become (in Osborne's phrase) "polished and tensionless." But at other times what one hears is more like what the Sibelius scholar Robert Layton observed:

> I think it is true that the kind of cultured, perfectly tuned, and perfectly blended aural image that Karajan was capable of producing could excite a negative response in some people. . . . I confess that when I first heard [his] 1965 version of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony I reacted to it in exactly that way. It was like the Finnish landscape perceived through the windows of a limousine; there was a feeling of being insulated from experience. And yet when I went back to the performance in later years, I didn't feel that. . . . That sense of something coming *between* the music and the listener had completely disappeared.

In the minds of some listeners, the "negative response" to which Layton refers came to be confounded, understandably enough, with the *means*, both musical and personal, by which Karajan produced such exquisite sounds. "Conducting tends to spoil the character," the violinist Carl Flesch once observed, and there can be little doubt that, in the long run, Karajan spoiled both his character and his art by seeking a degree of power over others that eventually proved self-destructive. His cynical response to the rise of Hitler shows him to have been infected early on with the seeds of opportunism; in his maturity, his utter certainty that he was a genius led on more than one occasion to less than genius-like results.

I suspect it may never be possible for sensitive listeners to hear Karajan's recordings without feeling a twinge of guilt. For there is no getting around the uncomfortable fact that at his best, he was all but supreme in a remarkably wide variety of music. Nor were his performances always tainted by his hypertrophied ego; sometimes, in fact, they were almost eerily selfless. To listen admiringly to this Karajan—the truly great Karajan—is to strike a Faustian bargain of one's own. How much is beauty worth? Is there a statute of limitations on the sins of an artist? That such questions can seriously be asked about Karajan is eloquent tribute to his seductive, morally equivocal art.

Herbert von Karajan on CD: A Select Discography

KARAJAN RECORDED profusely from 1938 until shortly before his death in 1989, making as many as five different versions of the key items in his repertoire. All but the most popular go in and out of print frequently and unpredictably, and some of the finest—such as the 1947 Strauss *Metamorphosen*, the 1966 Shostakovich Tenth Symphony, and the 1975 Stravinsky *Le Sacre du printemps*—are currently unavailable in the U.S.

With that caveat in mind, here are ten recordings, all currently in print, that show Karajan at his very best:

1947: The first recording of Brahms's *German Requiem*, with the soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, the bass-baritone Hans Hotter, and the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna Singverein (EMI 61010).

1956: The first recording of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, with Schwarzkopf, the mezzo-soprano Christa Ludwig, and the Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus (EMI 56113, three CD's). Also, the first recording of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, with the soprano Maria Callas, the tenor Giuseppe di Stefano, and the La Scala Orchestra and Chorus (EMI 56333, two CD's).

1962: The first recording of Puccini's *Tosca*, with di Stefano, the soprano Leontyne Price, and the Vienna Philharmonic (London 21670, two CD's).

1965: The third recordings of Sibelius's Symphony No. 4 in A Minor, Op. 63, and Symphony No. 5 in E Flat, Op. 82, with the Berlin Philharmonic (DGG 57748, two CD's).

1969: Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5 in B Flat, Op. 100, with the Berlin Philharmonic (DGG 37253).

1973: Honegger's Symphony No. 3, *Liturgique*, with the Berlin Philharmonic (DGG 47435).

1978: Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, with the mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, the baritone Richard Stilwell, and the Berlin Philharmonic (EMI 67168, three CD's).

1981-82: Haydn's Symphony No. 94 in G Major (*Surprise*) and Symphony No. 101 in D Major (*Clock*), with the Berlin Philharmonic (DGG 39038).

1982: The live recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 9, with the Berlin Philharmonic (DGG 39024, two CD's).

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Books in Review

Summa Cum Latte

Bobos in Paradise:
The New Upper Class and
How They Got There
by David Brooks
Simon & Schuster. 276 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Gary Rosen

A MINOR but persistent theme of this year's campaign coverage has been the remarkable symmetry in the personal background of the presidential nominees. Al Gore and George W. Bush may stand apart on matters of policy, but both, we have been reminded, are the products of vast privilege—the wealthy, privately educated, and politically connected sons of a WASP establishment that is, thank you, quite alive and well. As the *New York Times* headlined a dual profile, "From the Ruling Class, Meet the Next President."

David Brooks agrees that America is still run by an identifiable elite. Only, it is not the old WASP elite represented by the likes of Gore and Bush, and its dominance is visible in the pages of the *Times* not just occasionally but every single Sunday—in the paper's wedding announcements. Here, Brooks archly observes, we find the socially prominent nuptials of our real ruling class, "the Résumé Gods":

> When you look at the *Times* wedding page, you can almost feel the force of the mingling SAT scores. It's Dartmouth marries Berkeley, MBA weds Ph.D., Fulbright hitches with Rhodes, Lazard Frères joins with CBS, and summa cum laude embraces summa cum laude. . . . The *Times* emphasizes four things about a person—college degrees, graduate degrees, career path, and parents' profession—for these are the markers of upscale Americans today.

More importantly, he stresses, these "markers" have become accessible in recent decades to talented and ambitious Americans of every description, especially those who are neither male, nor white, nor Protestant.

In his insightful and highly entertaining new book, Brooks—a senior editor at the *Weekly Standard* and a wide-ranging contributor to a number of publications, including COMMENTARY—explores the peculiar tastes, manners, morals, and ideology of those who now stand atop the American pecking order. His method, as he describes it, is "comic sociology"—more P.J. O'Rourke than Daniel Bell—but he also recognizes (if not, in the end, as fully as he might) that the character of our elites is a serious matter. As they go, so goes much of the country.

ACCORDING TO Brooks, today's upper class is the product of two seemingly contradictory legacies of the late 1950's and 1960's, both of them intimately tied to American higher education. On the one hand, it was during this era that the premier universities in the U.S. became considerably more meritocratic, embracing standardized tests and admitting students "on the basis of brains rather than blood." Out went the gentlemanly "mediocrities from the old WASP families" and in came unprecedented numbers of, among others, Jews and women.

GARY ROSEN *is the managing editor of* COMMENTARY *and the author of* American Compact: James Madison and the Problem of Founding.

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In short order, however, these same universities were overtaken by a powerful countercultural tide. Politics and sex were key elements in this rebellion, Brooks concedes, but at its core was "a challenge to conventional notions of success." Repelled, or so they said, by a social code based on income, possessions, and respectability, the student radicals of the 1960's declared their determination to lead lives grounded in "spiritual and intellectual ideals." Their new cardinal virtue: "self-expression."

For Brooks, the great accomplishment of the educated elite that has emerged during the 1990's is to have reconciled the ethic of meritocratic achievement with the spirit of creativity and personal emancipation. The impressively credentialed couples smiling out benignly from the wedding pages of the *Times* have found a way, he writes, to combine "the corporate imperative" and the "antiestablishment style." They are aggressive entrepreneurs who dress like hippies, world-class physicians who practice yoga, international financiers who worry about the rain forests and conscientiously recycle. They are, in Brooks's coinage, "bourgeois bohemians"—Bobos.

As BROOKS appreciates, the most visible—and easily parodied—expressions of this Bobo "synthesis" have to do with consumption. Abhorring the idea that they might be "pawns in a mass consumer society," the prosperous members of the educated class have become, instead, connoisseurs of everything they eat, drink, and wear. They order not a regular cup of coffee but "a vente almond Frappuccino made from the Angolan blend with raw sugar and a hint of cinnamon," and they belly up to the bar to select "one of 16,000 microbrews," picking their way "through winter ales, Belgian lagers, and blended wheats." As for clothing, they can never have "too much texture," especially of the third-world or backwoods variety, and they delight in high-tech adventure gear, from fleeces and parkas to hiking boots and glacier glasses.

When it comes to big-ticket items, Bobos assiduously avoid "the old clichés of conspicuous consumption"; for them, material things are not mere possessions but a deep reflection of their personalities. Money may be spent lavishly, Brooks notes, but only on things that can be interpreted as practical or edifying. A $65,000 Range Rover is a "tool." A "mega-kitchen" with nickel-plated state-of-the-art appliances is "a sign that you do your own chores." And expensive travel to remote, rustic locales—the hill country of Provence or Tuscany, the mountain hamlets of Nepal or the Andes—is a necessity of sorts, a respite for "spiritual development."

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Indeed, what most strikes Brooks about the world of Bobo pleasure is its relentless emphasis on usefulness and responsible moderation. Far from being the reckless hedonists sometimes portrayed by their critics, today's elites, he argues, have introduced a whole new set of sumptuary laws and social regulations. Smoking, hard liquor, and fatty foods are emphatically out; driving without a seatbelt is "positively immoral," exceeded in depravity only by the grave sin of "unsafe" sex. By contrast, regular visits to the health club are a must, and physically demanding hobbies like mountaineering and marathon-running are de rigueur. Bobos share "the bohemian impulse to experience new sensations," Brooks writes, but they invariably harness it to the bourgeois cause of "self-improvement."

THE FACT that these ascetic rituals serve to perfect the body rather than the soul is not lost on Brooks. Bobo religion, he concedes, tends to be a rather wan affair, and not just when it takes the form of horses-and-creeks "spiritualism" in the wilds of Montana. Even those members of the upscale class who venture into traditional churches and synagogues usually do so not out of any deep belief or commitment but rather because they long for "moral community"; they want to "belong"—but on their own terms, accepting only those practices and doctrines that conform to their modern, pluralistic sensibilities. Unfortunately, as Brooks recognizes, building "a house of obligation on a foundation of choice" is a "problematic" exercise, and as a result, seldom satisfies.

His assessment of Bobo morality and politics is similarly mixed, but more positive on the whole. Though distrustful of authority, today's elites reject the antinomianism and radical grandstanding of their 1960's forebears, favoring instead a mild and tolerant orderliness in personal and public matters.

> They aim for decency, not saintliness, prosaic goodness, not heroic grandeur, fairness, not profundity. In short, they prefer a moral style that doesn't shake things up, but that protects the status quo where it is good, and gently tries to forgive and reform the things that are not so good.

At the ballot box, this translates into an affinity for such "reconciling banners" as "compassionate conservatism" (Bush) and "practical idealism" (Gore), and makes Bobos leery of "podium-pounding 'conviction politicians.'" In politics, as in so much else, they seek a "peaceful middle ground."

In Brooks's eyes, there is much to recommend in this centrist, meliorative attitude. It is, he believes, an appropriate and understandable re-

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sponse to the cultural and economic excesses of recent decades. What he finds lacking in it, however, is any animating public ideal or purpose, especially as compared to the dutiful patriotism of the old WASP establishment. For Brooks, the chief task ahead for members of the Bobo class is to turn their formidable talents to "re-energizing" national politics, pursuing a course of "reform at home and activism abroad" and, he hopes, ushering "America into another golden age."

LIKE ANY broad, colorful portrait painted in bold strokes, *Bobos in Paradise* sparkles in many places but seems overdone or incomplete in others. The book abounds in perfectly rendered vignettes about the folkways of the educated class of the 1990's, a number of them laugh-out-loud funny. Nor is it surprising that David Brooks should possess such easy familiarity with this group or be so well disposed toward it. As he acknowledges from the start, he, too, is a Bobo, and writes in part from the personal experiences of himself, his friends, and his colleagues. "We're not so bad," he opines. "Wherever we educated elites settle, we make life more interesting, diverse, and edifying."

From my own experience as a member of this class (and unbiased, I feel sure, by my embarrassingly conformist tastes in beer, vacations, and religious observance), I am inclined to agree. Today's striving, cosmopolitan, bicoastal elite may not be precisely what Jefferson had in mind when he imagined a "natural aristocracy," but it is nonetheless, as Brooks points out, an astonishing democratic achievement—a ruling class based not "on blood or wealth or military valor" but largely on educational attainments to which most Americans can now aspire.

I would hesitate, however, to classify myself or my peers as "Bobos" (and not simply out of a desire not to be mistaken for a pet chimp). For if the bourgeois half of the label is apt enough, the bohemian half amounts to little more than an affectation. Bohemianism, it should be recalled, is not just a set of niche-market consumer preferences; it is, by venerable tradition, a way of life. Looking back over the past several decades, one is impressed far less by the endurance of such genuine bohemianism as did arise from the 1960's as by the awesome power of American capitalism to accommodate and co-opt even its self-styled critics.

This is not, of course, to deny the continuing influence of the liberationist, anti-authority dogma of the 60's counterculture on many members of today's educated elite (not to mention the rest of the country). But as Brooks rightly emphasizes, this is by and large a fairly sober bunch. Their personal morality and attitudes toward public life may be undemanding, even lax, but they are hardly libertines or radicals, and have even tried to revive certain traditional institutions, chattering endlessly about their own strongly felt need for "community" and "civil society."

But just there may be the difficulty. After all, whatever problems the educated class itself has experienced in recent decades, it is not the sector of our society that has suffered most from the pathologies to which the creed of self-expression and personal liberation gave rise. As observers like William J. Bennett, Myron Magnet, and Charles Murray have long argued, our elites—by virtue of the qualities that make them elites—have been able to insulate themselves pretty well from the worst effects of their own ideas and attitudes. It is the less-well-off, especially the underclass, whose lives have been upended, if not destroyed.

David Brooks does not tell us much about the precise character of the public service that he would like to see performed by the educated set. But one must hope that it would include some long-overdue attention to the wider culture that this elite has done so much to foster, from the woeful state of many of our schools to the noxious emanations of our popular entertainment. His provocative book will certainly have done a good turn if, in addition to flattering and poking fun at "Bobos," it actually encourages them to follow the example of the old WASP establishment by shouldering the responsibilities of their high standing.

Orthodoxies

Chosen by God:
A Brother's Journey
by Joshua Hammer
Hyperion. 241 pp. $22.95

Reviewed by
Wendy Shalit

IN THE 1992 movie *A Stranger Among Us*, the heroine, a police detective played by Melanie Griffith, becomes entranced by the spiritual beauty of the hasidic community in whose midst she finds herself: not only does she solve a murder mystery, she even learns a thing or two about friendship and true intimacy. Things are quite otherwise, however, in *A Price Above Rubies* (1998), where the character played by René Zellweger has to dodge an obstacle course of cruel, lecherous Hasidim who finally take her baby away from her when she neglects to light Sabbath candles.

As attitudes toward religion go in the world of the movies and popular culture, *A Stranger Among Us* would seem to be the exception, *A Price Above Rubies* closer to the

WENDY SHALIT *is a contributing editor of* City Journal *and the author of* A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue. *Her article "Among the Gender Benders" appeared in* COMMENTARY*'s January 1999 issue.*

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rule—at least as far as Orthodox Judaism is concerned. Readers of the *New York Times*, for example, must have become inured by now to that paper's routine depictions of Orthodox Jews as a particularly benighted segment of humanity, especially when it comes to the treatment of women. In this connection, the paper's prejudices could only have been confirmed by the recent arrival here of a new Israeli film called *Kadosh*, which opened to almost unanimously gushing reviews.

Set in the right-wing Orthodox neighborhood of Jerusalem known as Mea Shearim, *Kadosh* explores the allegedly brutalized condition of women in traditional Jewish communities. One of the movie's male protagonists, when he is not bleating out millenarian nonsense from his car, keeps busy by forcing himself on his new bride and beating her when he suspects her of infidelity. Another refuses to make love to his wife of ten years because they are childless and the Talmud, supposedly, considers a barren woman to be "dead."

In short, this is a movie that says more about the ultrasecularist politics of its director—and his intended audience—than it does about the Orthodox Judaism that it grotesquely and quite ignorantly maligns. (The director, Amos Gitai, has characterized *Kadosh* as "my way of voting against the religious Right"; in an interview with the ever-obliging *Times*, he enlarged his target to include "the Jewish religion in general.") And yet, perhaps because the actors speak Hebrew, it has been accepted as verisimilitude incarnate—if not, indeed, as a faithful documentary of the Orthodox way of life. The *Times*'s Stephen Holden, for example, vouchsafed to his readers on the basis of this movie that Orthodox Jews have a "fear and loathing of sex" and that their women, who are viewed as "little more than baby-making machines," are regularly required to undergo "primitive cleansing and fertility rituals." Richard Corliss of *Time* has hailed *Kadosh* as "the best Israeli film ever," and last spring it became the first Israeli movie in 25 years to be screened at the Cannes film festival.

And now there is this book by Joshua Hammer, the Berlin bureau chief of *Newsweek*. Its subject is the seemingly inexplicable transformation of the author's younger brother, Tony, from a typical product of a 60's-style secular upbringing into a "Torah Jew." This development, Hammer writes, marked such a "total rejection of who our family was," and so filled him with "rage and embarrassment," as to cause a two-decade-long break between the two brothers. Only with the passage of time did he come to the curative conclusion that "by approaching

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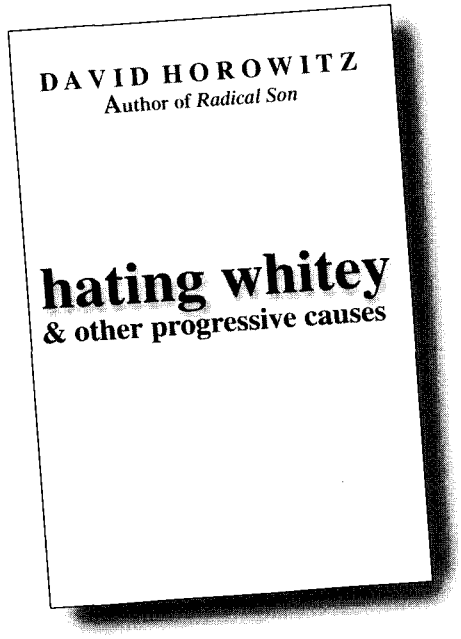

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[Tony] through the cold eyes of a journalist, . . . I could find a way to repair a rift and restore a semblance of completeness to my family."

As this earnest declaration may suggest, *Chosen by God* is, emotionally, something of a mixed bag: on page after page, Hammer plays out the tension between his creditable if belated desire to understand and, as it were, reclaim Tony and his still-undigested revulsion at the path his brother has taken in life. The book's organization reflects this emotional dividedness all too well, shuttling back and forth from past to present to past in almost random fashion.

Thus, from reading about the brothers' childhood in New York we might next be treated to an account of Tony's experiences in Israel in the early 80's, only to be brought back to the spring of 1976 when the boys' mother announces she is moving to Paris with her best friend June, then forward again to a visit the two brothers pay to a devout hasidic community outside Montreal where Joshua is thrust unceremoniously into a room smelling of "gefilte fish and unwashed bodies," and so forth. If, at its best, this technique can create the impression of a mystery being uncovered layer by layer, sometimes it results in an awkward and confusing pastiche. (Matters are not helped by the numerous errors—of transcription and observation alike—that litter the text.)

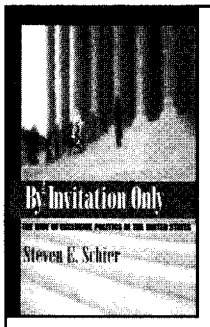
The Hammers' father, a correspondent for the *New York Times* who achieved minor celebrity in the 1970's with a book about the American intervention in Vietnam, espoused the following philosophy concerning the religion into which he had been born: "As long as there's anti-Semitism in the world, I'll identify myself as Jewish, but I'm not going to force anything on my children." What emerges from his son Joshua's narrative is that he did quite a bit of forcing in other directions: specifically, toward left-wing politics and militant secularism, combined with an upwardly mobile stress on the need to follow "steady courses toward successful careers."

When Joshua was thirteen and Tony nine, their parents divorced, and thereafter the two boys lived with their mother in a tiny apartment in the Bronx. (It was from this apartment that she would decamp for Paris in 1976.) Joshua writes that he missed his father and hated him for leaving, but, like a dutiful son, "marched in antiwar rallies [and] lectured my classmates on the evil of our involvement in Southeast Asia." Within a brief period, their father had remarried, this time to a Methodist woman who declined to convert to Judaism but agreed to a wedding performed by an "antiwar rabbi."

Joshua went on to Princeton; Tony, after graduating from the High School of Performing Arts, enrolled at Hobart College in upstate New York. When he went to Israel in 1981, it was not to find his roots as a Jew but to live the socialist ideal on a kibbutz.

In Israel, however, something happened: Tony discovered himself as a Jew, and first and foremost as a Zionist. He wrote home about what he was experiencing: "All I can say now is that Israel is remarkable. Israel is a brother, a father, a mother, and a home for me." In short order, his brother Joshua was dispatched to investigate and report back to their father.

The report was bad: not only was Tony, who had in the meantime moved to an apartment in Jerusalem, living among dirty dishes and other signs of squalor, but wherever the two young men went in Jerusalem, Orthodox Jews were inescapable. A born skeptic, Tony had already confided to his elder brother his suspicion that Torah Jews "want[ed] to set humanity back three centuries," and yet on the streets of Jerusalem he did not at all seem to mind their importuning ways. Joshua, however, was repelled, and never more so than by the sight



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of men praying publicly at the Western Wall, men who "flailed their arms and legs and furiously wagged their heads—two hundred men seized simultaneously by a shared epileptic fit."

During his stay in Israel, Joshua saw something else that would prefigure what was about to occur within his own family. At a Jerusalem yeshiva he spotted an old acquaintance from Princeton, someone he remembered "as a budding journalist, a Frisbee player, a typically ambitious assimilated Jew." Now this young man was "sitting alone, reading Hebrew . . . a shadow of the ebullient college student I remembered." The encounter was "frightening":

> Seeing him transformed into a hollow-cheeked ascetic . . . suddenly made it clear to me that his religious indoctrination was a form of brainwashing. . . . I viewed his religious commitment not as a positive characteristic but as a sign of weakness, the mark of a person who lacked a strong sense of self.

Within months, alas, Tony was excitedly writing home that he, too, had been trying out life in a yeshiva, and was finding it "the most intellectually stimulating experience of my life." So quick and so thoroughgoing was the consequent transformation of his outlook, indeed of his entire person, that, on a return visit to New York shortly thereafter, he shocked his father into revising the family's naïve "belief that this 'conversion' of Tony's had no staying power." "It's madness," Hammer *père* commented upon discovering that Tony had sat shivering on the stoop outside their apartment building because he would not carry a key or ring the doorbell on the Sabbath. "He was throwing his life away," adds Joshua, "abandoning his promise for a world of meaningless ritual and superstition."

The final blow came soon enough, as Tony, who had by now changed his name to Tuvia, became engaged to a young woman named Ahuva, a student at an Orthodox yeshiva in Monsey, New York and, like him, a "returnee" to Judaism. ("'They've got him,' I said. 'They've f---ing got him.'") At their wedding, Tony seemed to his aghast family a "zombie . . . like a troll in a trance."

And so the boys broke. For some time, Joshua refused to visit his brother or even to acknowledge the births of his children. (They now number six; Joshua, at age forty-three, is unmarried.) As for the father, he saw his son once or at most twice a year. When the young couple, attempting to initiate a reconciliation, showed up at *People* magazine, where Joshua had just landed a job as a staff writer, the effect was electrifying:

> I froze at my desk, seized by panic. Quite simply, I was terrified by the prospect of receiving them in my office. . . . I had come to view Tony as a shameful secret that had to be concealed. I did not want my colleagues whispering about him in the hallways, speculating about what had caused my brother to retreat into his blissed-out, brainwashed state.

Indeed, *why* someone once so intellectually energetic and naturally skeptical as Tony/Tuvia should have taken the turn he did remains a thoroughly baffling question to his elder brother. Monsey, a community of about 40,000 observant Jews where Tony now lives a perfectly contented life, strikes Joshua Hammer as a place that has "reverted to the pre-industrial age," while its most prestigious yeshiva reminds him of "photographs of the Unabomber's sanctuary in the wilds of Montana." The sight of Tony praying in public with other men is something out of a horror movie:

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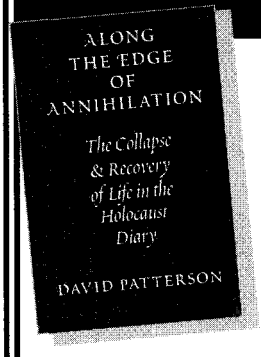

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"he pounded his fist against his chest and began to rotate his head, his mouth first slack-jawed, then twisted into a grimace," while the others emitted "a strange sound, a blood-curdling howl not unlike the baying of a pack of wolves."

True, when Hammer actually began to spend time with his brother and sister-in-law for the purpose of writing this book, he did begin to consider that many of his assumptions (albeit the more trivial ones) might have been misplaced. Thus, he was surprised to find that Ahuvah was "the opposite of the stereotype of the Orthodox Jewish wife—meek, utterly subservient to the demands of her husband." He was no less surprised at the sight of his brother playing ringtoss at a carnival: "he seemed, for a moment, like any father on an outing with his children." And when he learned of the deep struggle his brother had to undergo in order to refashion his character according to the moral precepts of the Torah, let alone to master the vast and difficult literature of rabbinic law, it even dawned upon him that Tony's transformation might have been "a reflection of my brother's fortitude, not his weakness."

Yet this epiphany, which arrives smack in the middle of *Chosen by God*, is buried by pages and pages yet to come on what Joshua sees as the insularity, the exclusivity, the stifling intolerance, the sheer dirt and poverty of his brother's environment, so radically at odds with the sophisticated, option-filled life he has chosen for himself and that once seemed to lie before Tony as well. Though he is capable of admitting to a certain envy—"Tony's sharply defined identity," Joshua writes in one of his moments of candor, "stood against my own lack of clarity, the suspicion that my chosen profession was a shallow one"—the manifest fact that in Orthodox Judaism his brother, far from atrophying or lapsing into backwardness, has found both intellectual challenge *and* a true and fulfilling way of life is simply too dissonant a reality to acknowledge.

THERE ARE quite a number of Tonys these days in the Jewish world (and not just in the Jewish world). And there are even more Joshuas: more or less well-meaning relatives who cannot comprehend, or are genuinely appalled by, the attraction exercised by religion—especially their own religion!—on some of the best and brightest of their young people. But then, of course, it is not really their religion: as this book attests, their own faith has long since been invested in the rituals of a secularism fully as intolerant as their most fevered imaginings of Orthodoxy. The thought of that belief-system being exposed in all its hypocrisy must be unbearable beyond words. At least, for such people, there is always the comforting presence of the *New York Times*; so far, it has never let them down.

The Three R's

The Educated Child:
A Parents' Guide from
Preschool Through
Eighth Grade
by William J. Bennett,
Chester E. Finn, Jr., and
John T. E. Cribb, Jr.
Free Press. 666 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Marc Berley

SEVENTEEN YEARS ago, a federally mandated study of education in America declared us "a nation at risk." Today, despite numerous new programs, new "methodologies," and billions of new dollars, many elementary schools still fail to teach the basics to the children in their charge: recent assessments show that fewer than one in three fourth graders are proficient readers, and the statistics are even grimmer when it comes to writing, math, and history. No less disturbingly, this decades-long failure has been accompanied by a rise in educational theories ("discovery learning"), jargons ("developmentalism"), and conveniences (television as childcare) that have created an ever-greater distance between what children are taught and what their parents know about it. For many parents, becoming actively involved in the education of their children is therefore as daunting an enterprise as it is an overwhelmingly necessary one.

For such parents, relief is at hand in *The Educated Child*. Comprehensive, clear, full of wisdom based on experience, it is the work of two people—William J. Bennett and Chester E. Finn, Jr.—who know more, and have sounder ideas, about elementary education than perhaps anyone else in America, and they have been ably assisted here by the skills of John T. E. Cribb, Jr.

The Educated Child is organized in three parts. The first describes the role of parents as their children's first and most important teachers. The second and by far the largest section examines the core knowledge that students should absorb between kindergarten and eighth grade. And the third helps parents grapple with a laundry list of issues from ADD and Ritalin to multiculturalism, special education, tracking, tests and testing, and more. While *The Educated Child* accurately describes the various parties and ideologies that are to blame for the low performance of America's students, it is no finger-pointing exercise. Rather, it is a positive book, designed to "inform, empower, and encourage" parents.

"IN SOME respects, the chances of your child's doing well in school are

---

MARC BERLEY, *president of the Foundation for Academic Standards & Tradition, is co-editor of* The Diversity Hoax *and author of the forthcoming* After the Heavenly Tune.

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What are the facts?

Land for Peace. The whole concept is absurd. Never in the history of the world has any nation returned lands to those who have attacked it. Even so, in line with the Camp David accord, Israel has yielded the vast Sinai to Egypt. It has yielded Gaza and about 40% of the "West Bank" to the Palestinians. Over 90% of the Arab population of the territories is under the control of the Palestinian Authority. What else is expected of a country that occupies only a fraction of 1% of the lands occupied by the Arabs? And shouldn't land for peace work both ways? Shouldn't the Arabs give up some land to get peace? Or why not just simply "peace for peace"?

> "By not yielding to pressure and by not allowing Israel to be strategically weakened, Mr. Barak will bring peace with security, *shalom batuach,* to Israel and to the entire Middle East."

A Palestinian State. Israel could not survive if Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") were in unfriendly hands. And, especially in light of the experience since the "handshake," during which time more Israelis were killed by Palestinian terrorists than in any comparable previous period, there can be little question of the enduring hostility of the Arabs. The "West Bank" mountain ridges dominate the narrow waist of Israel, in which over 70% of the Jewish population, 80% of its industrial base, and the most important military installations are located. The Palestinians would not need an army to make life in Israel impossible. Moveable Katyusha rockets would dominate the area. Israel needs to keep strategic control of the "West Bank," without which it would not be defensible.

Return of the "Refugees". Population transfers have occurred throughout history. In 1923, Greece and Turkey agreed to a resettlement of 2 million Greeks and 800,000 Turks; in 1945, the resettlement of 3 million Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia was arranged. Following the collapse of its North African empire, France accepted close to 1.5 million people. More than 12 million(!) Muslims and Hindus were exchanged between India and Pakistan. Israel has recognized this historical necessity. But the "Arab Nation", with its enormous wealth and vast under-populated lands, has stubbornly refused to face facts. Instead of allowing the Palestinians who left Israel in 1948 (and their descendants) to be integrated into their societies, they have, for the past fifty years, kept them in miserable "refugee camps" and have encouraged them to plot vengeance and terrorism. Return of these people to Israel, including Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") is impossible. Neither Israel nor any Palestinian entity could absorb them. There is not enough land and not enough water. It would be as unthinkable as for those 3 million Germans to return to Poland and the Czech republic or, for that matter, for the 800,000 Jews who fled or were expelled from the Arab countries to return to their original homes.

Jerusalem. Before the end of the 1967 Six-Day War, no claims to Jerusalem being a Moslem holy city or the capital of any Arab country were asserted. But for over two thousand years, Jews have been living in Jerusalem and they have been the majority population since the 19th century. Why should they give up their capital, their holy city as far back as memory goes—or even any part of it? The Moslems have their holy cities, Mecca and Medina, and they have 22 Arab capitals. There are important Arab cities in the "West Bank", under full control of the Palestinian Authority. But Jerusalem is the eternal and indivisible capital of the Jewish State.

These are the most important issues that Ehud Barak and his government will have to confront in the final status talks. As to Jewish "settlements" in the "West Bank": Netanyahu has made clear that Jews have the right to live in any part of the land of Israel, all of the land west of the Jordan River. And why not? How is it possible that 160,000 Jews living among 1 million Arabs in the "West Bank" should be an obstacle to peace if over 1 million Arabs live within the "green line" of Israel? They don't have to fear for their lives and nobody considers them an obstacle to peace. By standing firm and resolute, by not yielding to pressure from any source, domestic or foreign, and by not allowing Israel to be strategically weakened, Mr. Barak will have earned the trust of Isreal and the world and will bring peace with security, *shalom batuach,* to Israel and to the entire Middle East.

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determined *before* he reaches kindergarten," the authors caution. Young minds are impressionable, and habits settle in "through the standards that parents set" in their once-in-a-lifetime opportunity during the preschool years to give their child a good start:

> Parents often get a subtle, alluring, but deeply damaging message from today's culture: your role is not quite so important after all. You can delegate. You can outsource. . . . You must resist these temptations. For good or ill, you are always your child's most influential teacher.

Not that *The Educated Child* is a brief for home schooling. Despite the general decline in public education, the authors assure us that there are many good teachers out there; for parents, the task is to "trust, but verify." To help in that task, they devote approximately half their book—Part II—to an understanding of the basic components of "The Core Curriculum," with chapters on English, history and geography, art and music, math, and science. For each area and grade they offer lists of subject matter, drawn from the scholar E.D. Hirsch's "Core Knowledge Sequence," as well as similar lists of the skills students should be acquiring as they go along. In addition, there are suggestions for ways to assess the school's existing curriculum and for supplemental instruction at home, and a section on such life-jacket issues as "What is the 'New' New Math?"

It is a particular virtue of this book not only to assert that a core curriculum in the basics is invaluable but also to explain in clear, honest language precisely why. The authors are particularly cogent on the need, in English and history, to place the emphasis on Western civilization—because, they write, it is the "repository of our highest shared ideals," and because in its riches those who "seek answers to the great questions" will find guidance. Reading the classics, moreover, helps children from all backgrounds enter into the common culture of American life as they "broaden, deepen, and sharpen" their minds.

The lists of subjects in the authors' core curriculum are, admittedly, ambitious; they are supposed to be. The point is not that first-graders are expected to become experts in "Mesopotamia as the 'Cradle of Civilization'"—perhaps the most demanding example on offer here; it is that great stories illustrating the basic principles of civilization fit into a larger plan. First graders may and will forget the details, but they will have been given a basis for learning more in later grades.

The lists also directly engage the debate between "progressive" and "content-based" teaching philosophies, a debate in which, needless to say, the authors come down squarely on the side of content. They are especially sharp in countering the argument—a staple of "progressive" educators—that giving students difficult or challenging content will kill their love of learning. On the contrary, it is progressive methodologies such as "critical thinking" and "learning how to learn," not to mention the self-esteem craze, that have led to woeful test scores, in part by actually killing a love of learning in many students.

Content—not baseless praise—is what excites: dinosaurs, steam engines, stories of remarkable people doing remarkable things in a world beyond "me" and "my neighborhood." Even John Dewey, the father of progressive education, warned that rejecting content in the interest of student creativity was "stupid." Knowledge, the authors of *The Educated Child* rightly declare, "fosters—not stifles—creativity."

The Educated Child is an indispensable tool for parents whose concern for their child's education has outpaced their familiarity with schools, basic educational principles, the way teachers talk, or their own roles as teachers. Not a mandated

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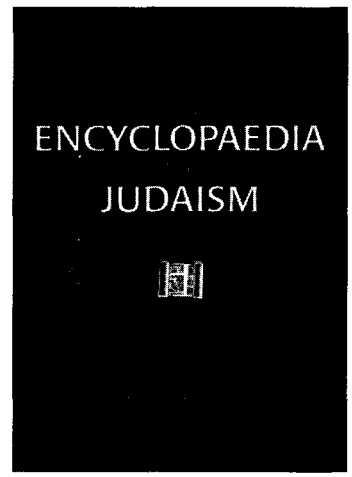

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plan but rather a flexible, friendly guide, it is meant to be used as a resource, to be consulted as a child passes from the earliest years to eighth grade. But whether they dip into it as needed or read it from cover to cover, parents who partake of its wisdom will indeed find themselves, exactly as the authors promise, "informed, empowered, and encouraged."

I Do

Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar: Readings on Courtship and Marrying
by Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass
University of Notre Dame Press. 636 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Elizabeth Powers

THE TELEVISION special *Who Wants To Marry a Millionaire?* has undoubtedly left a smaller imprint on the consciousness of Americans than such longer-running spectacles as the O.J. Simpson murder trial or the presidential bid of John McCain. For one brief moment, however, the show did highlight a perduring social truth—women are drawn to men with juice, especially rich ones.

This must have been irksome to feminists who for the past 30 years have tried to convince us that, in the age of raised consciousness, women have transcended such "conditioned" responses to the power of the patriarchy and its values. Yet one should not gloat too much. Observing the fallout from the show—the exposure of the groom's problems with a previous girlfriend, the bride's less than honest representation of her record in the Gulf war—I kept thinking that, despite their silliness, these were two fundamentally attractive people. A generation ago, instead of making fools of themselves on national TV, they would have already been married, living not as Prince Charming and Cinderella but perhaps happily enough nevertheless. Instead, here was a handsome man in his forties, still single, and a smashing blonde who had reached the age of thirty-something without having been snagged.

How they found themselves in such a predicament is indirectly suggested by the present volume. Whether or not most young men today have become spoiled by the availability of sex without strings attached, they have at least become uncertain as to why they should bother marrying; and, increasingly, the same goes for women. *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar*—the images are from a sonnet by Robert Frost, written on the occasion of his daughter's marriage—seeks to remind us of why people *used* to court and marry, making a case for the proposition that the channeling of eros in marriage is "the true foundation for a superior way of life and happiness."

Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass teach at the University of Chicago, and Leon Kass in particular is familiar to readers of COMMENTARY for his many distinguished essays on medical ethics and biblical subjects. The volume they have edited is itself part of a series by diverse hands that is devoted to "the ethics of everyday life"—the other books in the series, all to be published by Notre Dame, concern work, teaching, leadership, and dying. Here, the Kasses offer an anthology of readings, ranging from Homer and the Bible to contemporary fiction, meant to shed light on the effect on our moral life of courtship and marriage, human rituals of which many young people today are ignorant. Fully and lucidly introduced, the sections of *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar* address such questions as: Why marry? How do I find and win the right one? What is married life like? And so forth.

THE MAJORITY of the readings in *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar* derive from a once-vital tradition of writing on what makes for the good life. They take for granted a human nature that is capable of being educated and transformed, if not to achieve transcendence then for the practical betterment of each of us as individuals and as members of society. Among the readings are a fair number that should be familiar—Socrates' speech on eros in the *Symposium*, Francis Bacon on married men and their relationship to the future, Rousseau's *Émile*. But there is also less familiar material: Immanuel Kant making the point that, in contrast to animals, human reason and imagination prolong the power of sexual attraction and help avoid surfeit; the German poet Rilke's subtle situating of eros in a world that offers many contending possibilities of fulfillment; the contemporary writer William Tucker drawing on human and animal biology to show how monogamy creates a social contract.

And so it goes, through literary accounts of courtship and marriage (Homer, Shakespeare, Austen, Tolstoy, Kipling) and the meditations of ethicists (from the author of the book of Genesis to Miss Manners) on the gap between knowing what is the right thing to do and actually doing it. In the latter category, one selection in particular, "Bed and Board: Liturgies of Home" by the Episcopal priest Robert Farrar Capon, affectingly conveys the crucial importance of the daily exercise of the *act*—rather than the mere sentiment—of love and of the will to be faithful. Invoking and domesticating the figure of Beatrice, Dante's beloved, Capon ruminates on the two "geographies" of matrimony, the dining table and the marriage bed:

> Romance in marriage is not the artificial prolongation of the initial wonders of courtship. I can-

ELIZABETH POWERS *is co-editor of* Pilgrim Souls: A Collection of Spiritual Autobiographies.

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not be her swain ever again. But I can enter with her into the fellowship of the mystery, and that is romance indeed. Beatrice, then, lies in my bed, and grows old and worn along with me. She is the minister of more than herself; that is exactly why I need not fear for her inevitable growing less. We must decrease, but the Glory will increase.

This is a profound meditation, the fruit of a lifetime of thinking and experiencing. But the historical moment we now inhabit is impatient with such hard-earned wisdom (perhaps precisely because it *is* hard-earned). Of the small number of selections in this volume that offer some insight into our impatience, one of my favorites is "This is the Question," a balance sheet drawn up by Charles Darwin in the late 1830's when he was considering marriage to Emma Wedgwood. Among the items weighing against such a move were these, in Darwin's enumeration: "Not forced to visit relatives, and to bend in every trifle—to have the expense and anxiety of children—perhaps quarreling. *Loss of time*: cannot read in the evenings." By contrast, arguing against bachelorhood and for the "Marry" side were the following: "Imagine living all one's day solitarily in smoky dirty London House.—Only picture to yourself a nice soft wife on a sofa with good fire, and books and music perhaps—compare this vision with the dingy reality of Grt Marlboro' St."

Darwin's sensible assessment is unimaginable to many young men and women these days—which may be why two of them ended up getting hitched on a TV extravaganza. But the women present the harder case, it being a truism by now to say that men can be counted on to be on the lookout only for the erotic thrill while women seek "commitment." Anyone who has looked into contemporary women's writing (there are examples in this volume) must acknowledge the female analogue to this truism: that women, too, are to a great extent ruled by a mindset that celebrates "momentary genuineness" (the phrase appears in a selection in this book by Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, who contrasts it with a lifetime of trying to be true) and, just like men, have become averse to the effort that love requires if it is to thrive and grow.

And how can it be otherwise when so many young women earn their own money, have no responsibility to anyone but themselves and perhaps the boss, can eat when they want, go to bed when they like? However inchoately, these young women are also under the power of their own special charm—

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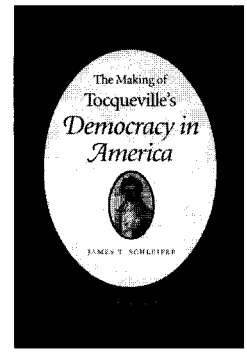

It is impossible to fully understand the American experience apart from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Moreover, it is impossible to fully appreciate Tocqueville by assuming that he brought to his visitation to America, or to the writing of his great work, a fixed philosophical doctrine. James T. Schleifer documents where, when, and under what influences Tocqueville wrote different sections of his work. In doing so, Schleifer discloses the mental processes through which Tocqueville passed in reflecting on his experiences in America and transforming these reflections into the most original and revealing book every written about Americans. As Russell B. Nye has observed, "Schleifer's study is a model of intellectual history, an account of the intertwining of a man, a set of ideas, and the final product, a book." The Liberty Fund second edition includes a new preface by the author and an epilogue, "The Problem of the *Two Democracies*."

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the ability to bestow sexual favors freely and seemingly without penalty. Nothing short of Prince Charming—or a millionaire—can induce them to give up what they view as freedom in order to enter into the compromises demanded by marriage, nor can they imagine the day when they will look up to discover that connubial comforts have passed them by.

Whether we will yet recover what once was known about the happiness of men and women remains to be seen. The speech of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, a very fine portrayal of the wholeness that love produces, shows how long Western culture has grappled with the problem of our innate sexual divisiveness. But for many rich insights into that problem, and into the rewards of the common life, there is no better place to start than with this book.

Incoming!

Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War
by Frances FitzGerald
Simon & Schuster. 592 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Gabriel Schoenfeld

In 1998, North Korea took the world by surprise when it lobbed a three-stage missile—the Taepo Dong 1—into the airspace over Japan. If properly reconfigured, this device might be able to hit portions of the western and central United States. The North Koreans have also fielded but not yet tested a much larger and more formidable missile, the Taepo Dong 2, capable of hitting every major city in the United States with—if Pyongyang manages to obtain one—a nuclear weapon.

Driven in part by the emerging North Korean threat, but also by the progress made by such countries as Iran and Iraq in acquiring long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction, the Clinton administration has executed what the *New York Times* called an "abrupt about-face" and begun to take an interest in missile defense—after years of cutting expenditures on research and development and placing roadblocks in the way of existing projects. This coming October, President Clinton is scheduled to decide whether to deploy a system of National Missile Defense (NMD) consisting of 100 long-range interceptors based in Alaska.

A good many liberals are convinced that NMD constitutes a betrayal of the administration's long-standing commitment to a linchpin arms-control accord, the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile pact, for the sake of a technology that is strategically destabilizing, far from proven, and very costly. Conservatives, for their part, noting that NMD is the *least* effective of the missile-defense systems in the Pentagon pipeline, harbor suspicions that Clinton is planning to perform one of his triangulations, pushing forward a scheme that only minimally enhances U.S. security while providing election-year political cover to the presidential candidacy of Al Gore.

Whatever one's view of the matter, it is at least remarkable that the U.S. is now ready, or close to being ready, to deploy a system capable of knocking incoming warheads out of the sky. Much of the credit for this fact belongs to a single man: Ronald Reagan. It was Reagan who, nearly two decades ago, pushed the U.S.

Gabriel Schoenfeld *is senior editor of* Commentary.

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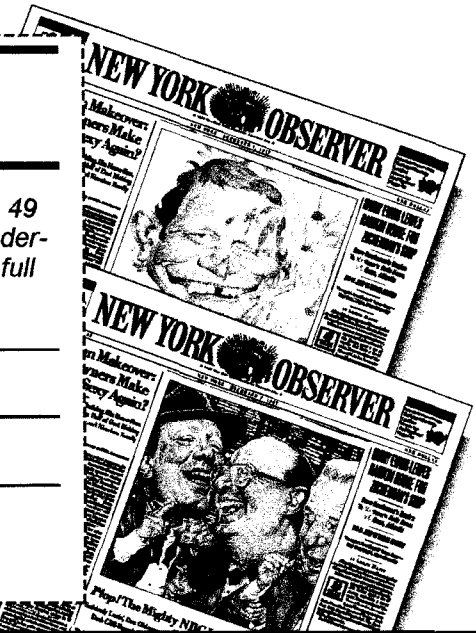

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into the modern missile-defense era when he launched his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). This was no small feat, accomplished with no little expenditure of political capital. It was, in fact, one of the defining acts of the Reagan presidency.

For an understanding of how all this came to pass, we are—perversely—indebted to Frances FitzGerald, a left-wing journalist who contributes frequently to the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books* and who established her name at the height of the Vietnam war with *Fire in the Lake* (1972), a Pulitzer Prize-winning book that celebrated the Communist Vietcong. In many ways, if not in most ways, *Way Out There in the Blue* is an atrocious book. And yet, as a history of U.S. missile-defense programs over the past two decades, it is also rather informative, if not always about its ostensible subject.

FitzGerald begins by reconstructing the origins of SDI in close detail, usefully dismantling some myths along the way. Thus, some of Reagan's former aides have erroneously traced his passion for missile defense to a pre-presidential briefing he received in 1979 at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). According to the President's former domestic-policy adviser Martin Anderson, for example, Reagan came away from his visit to NORAD deeply shocked:

> He couldn't believe the United States had no defense against Soviet missiles. He slowly shook his head and said, "We have spent all that money and have all that equipment, and there is nothing we can do to prevent a nuclear missile from hitting us. . . . We should have some way of defending ourselves against nuclear missiles."

But as FitzGerald shows, Reagan was by no means as unlettered in nuclear affairs as this suggests. He was well aware that the United States lacked missile defenses and relied solely on the threat of massive retaliation for its security. In fact, this deplorable state of affairs had been a consistent theme of his speeches over the preceding years. Throughout the latter half of the 70's, too, Reagan had been closely associated with the Committee on the Present Danger, a group of foreign-policy thinkers who were elaborating various U.S. responses to the Soviet military buildup.

Reagan's preoccupation with missile defense during his first years in the White House was thus anything but a lark. And to anyone who had been closely following his career, it should not have come as a surprise that from the very start he brought into his administration experts who favored pushing the idea along. No sooner was it sufficiently developed than he went on television on March 23, 1983, and called for a technological shield to render nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete."

This speech did not play well, to say the least; critics were legion, both within the government and without. The *Chicago Sun Times* called Reagan's proposal "an appalling disservice." To the *New York Times*, SDI was "a pipe dream, a projection of fantasy into policy." "Never in my wildest dreams," declared Congressman Ted Weiss of New York, "could I ever imagine our President taking to the national airwaves to promote a strategy of futuristic 'Star Wars' schemes as Mr. Reagan did last night." And even at the Pentagon itself, officials were, in FitzGerald's words, "appalled":

> The Joint Chiefs were stunned by the precipitous action and the sweeping language. The chief technical experts in the Pentagon were furious. According to witnesses, Richard DeLauer, the undersecretary of defense for research and engineering, "went ballistic" and asked how nuclear policy could be the subject of such a "half-baked political travesty."

Still, despite fierce opposition from various highly vocal quarters, the idea of putting a "roof" over the

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country to defend it from missile attack seemed attractive to broad segments of the public. One mid-decade poll cited by FitzGerald showed 73 percent of the American people in favor of pressing ahead. With such numbers behind him, Reagan managed to sell the program to Congress. It soon became one of the largest U.S. military research programs of all time.

ABROAD, AS FitzGerald recounts, SDI also delivered a powerful and not wholly anticipated jolt to the USSR. With the Soviet economy stretched to the limit by the existing burden of defense spending, the USSR's rulers understood that their country could not compete in an entirely new arena, particularly one that demanded the high technology in which they were falling ever further behind.

And so a prime new objective was quickly added to traditional Soviet diplomatic goals: stopping the U.S. from deploying a missile defense. At the Reykjavik summit of 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev, relates FitzGerald, "offered a series of breathtaking concessions . . . in order to get Reagan to confine SDI 'to the laboratory.'" To no avail. Reagan held fast and the negotiations fell apart. In short order, so did the USSR. Undergoing various transformations and name changes, SDI lived on, and lives on:

> It survived declining defense budgets. It survived a fall-off of public interest so complete that many consistent newspaper readers thought the program had died. It survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. It survived despite the fact that there was no technological breakthrough, and that by 1999 the prospects for deploying an effective interceptor remained not very much brighter than they had been in 1983.

I AM well aware that the plot summary I have just offered may make *Way Out There in the Blue* seem reasonable enough—perhaps even admirable. Yet I set out by calling it atrocious. What have I left out of my account?

For one thing, this book is a model of tendentious writing. Though my own rendition of FitzGerald's history confines itself to the facts, she operates under no such inhibition, freely strewing her narrative with tokens of her supercilious contempt for Ronald Reagan and all his works. Throughout *Way Out There in the Blue*, indeed, *anyone* who favors missile defense is depicted as a warmonger, extremist, or crank. Reagan's defense experts, she writes, hurling tar, were drawn from the "fringes of their profession"; they consisted of "a solid phalanx of hardliners" and "diehard right-wingers"; they were "far to the Right of any administration past," making it no surprise that they "managed to create the worst period of friction in U.S.-Soviet relations since the Cuban missile crisis."

As for Ronald Reagan himself, he was a man steeped in the "paranoid style" of American politics, a style never more in evidence than when he called the USSR an "evil empire." He came to believe in the "science-fiction" solution he had proposed to America's military problems not because of a briefing at NORAD, and not through his association with the Committee on the Present Danger, but because of a disturbing inability to distinguish in his own mind between Hollywood movies and the concrete realities of the physical world. Given his lifelong habit of "describ[ing] movie scenes as if they had happened in real life," it is no wonder that historians can point to films like *Murder in the Air* (1944) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* (1966) as "possible sources of Reagan's inspiration."

Reagan's intellectual deficiencies lead FitzGerald to what she characterizes as the deep conundrum of his presidency: how such a person could have come to "persuade the country of something that did not, and could not for the foreseeable future, exist." Indeed, solving this conundrum is the central purpose of her book—a purpose she finally accomplishes to her own satisfaction. The American people, she reports, were themselves primed to embrace SDI by the same irresistible force that had shaped the mind of their President: Hollywood.

Throughout his career, it seems, Reagan had presented himself as a "citizen-politician" very much akin to the hero of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the 1939 Frank Capra film that occupies an almost mythic status in the popular American imagination. Though missile defense was, in FitzGerald's words, "nothing more than a story," so well did Reagan exemplify Capra's hero—"he played Mr. Smith rather better than a real Mr. Smith might have played himself"—that both Democrats and Republicans clasped hands to support him. In the final analysis, SDI was "Reagan's greatest triumph as an actor-storyteller."

AN INTRIGUING theory, surely, and one that requires very little in the way of evidence to make it credible. All one need believe is, first, that the American people are impressionable dolts, and second, that the USSR's accumulating military potential over the 70's and 80's was a matter of no special significance; that Moscow was acquiring tens of thousands of nuclear weapons and mounting them on missiles pointed at the United States for no discernible purpose; and that SDI, being a technological hoax, could have had no possible bearing on the military balance between the rival superpowers.

The first requirement is easy enough for FitzGerald to meet. What else, she sneers, could one expect of "solid middle-class citizens" who dream of getting something for nothing, who buy junk bonds, and who prefer "to visit theme parks rather than real places" than that they would fall for a scheme like Star Wars? But the second requirement

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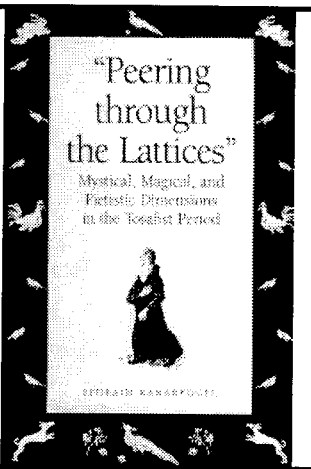

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presents a problem even to FitzGerald's formidable powers of discernment: how can she account for the fact that Gorbachev and company came to be so worried by a hugely expensive and unworkable system that they would make "breathtaking concessions" to stop it? After all, the masters of the Kremlin were not, presumably, under the sway of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

Troubled by this question, FitzGerald admits that "it is not easy to explain." In the end, she gamely concludes it was not Hollywood that influenced Moscow but an even more ethereal force: "there was some element of magical thinking involved."

True enough, in her own head. For what—to say it again—*Way Out There in the Blue* makes unwittingly but unmistakably clear is that the prospect of even a partially effective American system of defense against the Soviets' formidable arsenal of offensive nuclear weapons did indeed have a profound and salubrious impact on the concluding phase of the cold war. By the same token, the technological revolution set in motion by the Reagan administration could have an equally profound impact today in the face of a menace that is already beginning to endanger our major cities and to threaten the national existence of several of our allies. If the United States does actually manage to secure the skies from attack by rogue states armed with weapons of mass destruction, it will be thanks in no small part to what Frances FitzGerald calls Ronald Reagan's "absurd" idea.

All of which, in short, makes *Way Out There in the Blue* not only one of the most splenetic but one of the most frivolous pieces of analysis to appear under the imprimatur of a major publishing house in recent years.

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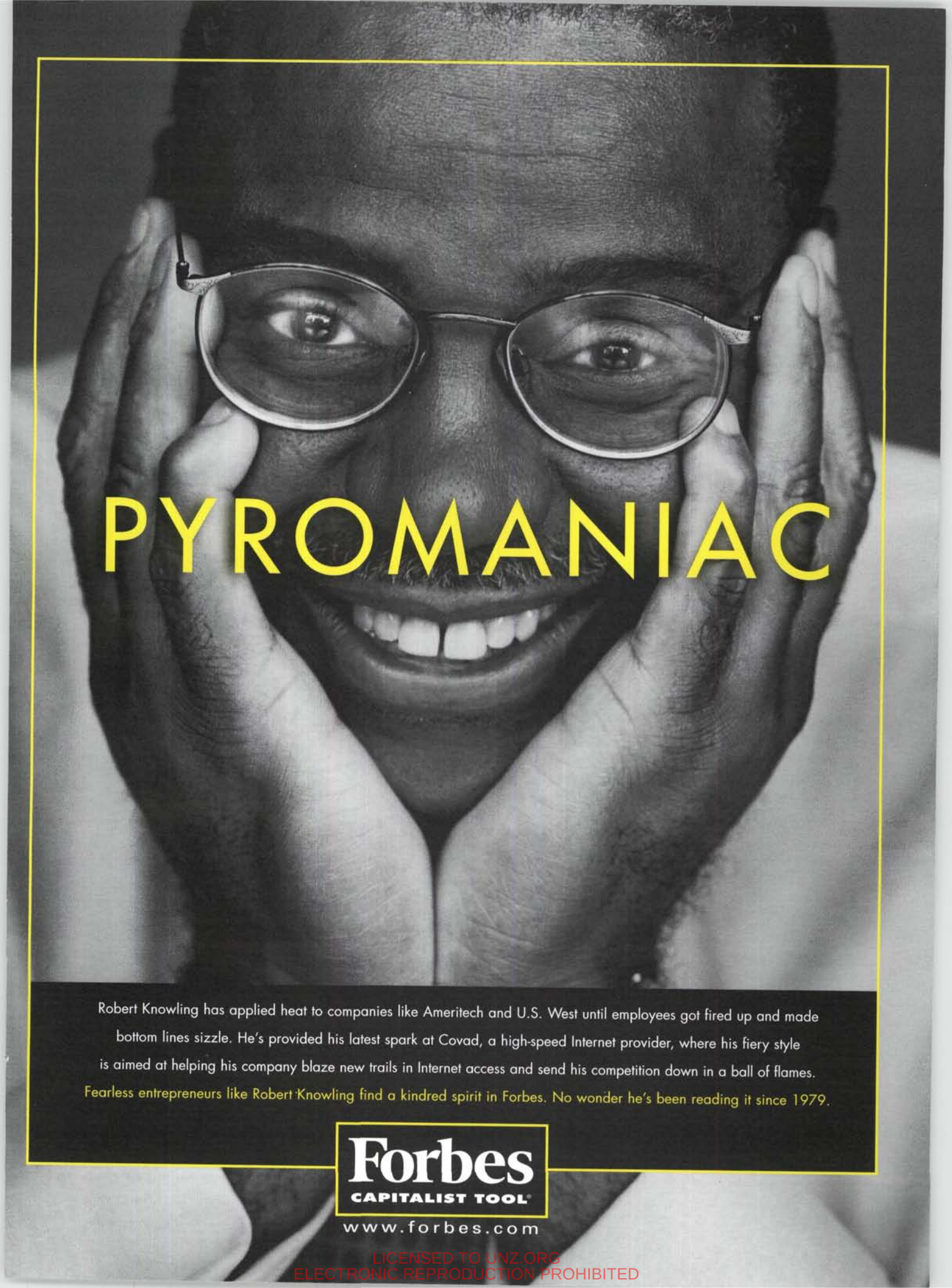

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